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'My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai' is, indeed, a heart-felt tribute from a son to his mother in an emotionally moving language. The biography is replete with instances of several passages glorifying the image of a loving mother, her role as a social worker, a philanthropist and, above all, a true representative of women in Nepali society with their strengths and weaknesses, and their commitment to abide by established norms, values and ideals.

• **Prof. Dr. Mohan P. Lohani**

'My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai' is not a true story only about my mother. It is a representative true story of the majority of Nepalese mothers. I have seen, heard, and read stories of many mothers that are similar and/or even worse than my mother's. The inner agony and pain of those mothers do not generally come into the limelight like my mother's. In this story, my mother has acted as a real-life heroine who performed the leading role epitomizing most mothers of Nepal.

• **Narendra Raj Prasai**

Illustrating the ups and downs that she experienced throughout her life, this book depicts my grandmother as the epitome of Nepalese women who was born and raised during Ranacracy. This book also reveals a pure love between a son and his mother. Never have I seen a son loving his mother like my father loved his mother. Maybe the aroma of that love also motivated me to translate the biography of my grandmother that my father wrote.

• **Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai**

Narendra Raj Prasai's **My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai**

Translated by *Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai*

Narendra Raj Prasai's

My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai

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Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai

My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai

(Biography)

Nai Prakashan

My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai

Narendra Raj Prasai

Translated by
Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai

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A Biography of Bhagiratha Prasai by Narendra Raj Prasai,
Translated by Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai

Publisher's Note

Nai Prakashan, ever since its establishment on January 29, 1996, is meditating in the world of Nepali Language – concentrating on the idea of 'universal brotherhood'. Founded with the aim of uplifting 'Nepali Literature', it has always honored norms and values of tradition and culture, and will always continue to do so. The recognition of talents in the country and abroad is one of the main objectives of this literary organization.

Nai Prakashan has been engaged in identifying and appreciating talents in the field of Nepali art and culture, language and literature, social services, science and technology, school of thoughts, games and sports, and alike. It is also engaged in conducting various cultural programs from time to time as well as in the publication of different series of books.

Nai Prakashan, ever adhering to pure Nepali values, norms, and assumptions is well on course to give exposure to every talent's constructive skills in a nice and pleasant manner. Indeed, after being born and expecting a cherishing life, it is the solemn duty of each and everyone to dedicate oneself to singing in praise of one's motherland. In this context, this organization is proudly inspired by the belief that service in the literary field is also an important aspect of service to the whole nation.

This book *My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai* has come into publication in line with various plans and programs formulated under the objectives of Nai Prakashan.

Narendra Raj Prasai is regarded as a genius in structuring literary organizations. He is also a renowned writer. Biography is considered the best of his literary genres. Among six and a half dozen of his published books, more than two dozens are the biographies. Further, more than seven hundred articles written by him on various topics including short biographies have already come into publication.

Bhagiratha Prasai, the mother of Narendra Raj Prasai, was a representative woman of Nepal. In this book, the writer has portrayed Nepalese society, the condition of Nepalese women, and the condition of senile single mothers during and after Ranacracy.

Despite being a scientist, Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai has shown a strong inclination towards Nepalese language and literature. As a devout descendant of his grandmother, it was Dr. Prasai's interest to translate the book *My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai* from Nepalese language to English language.

Nai Prakashan thanks translator Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai (the son of Narendra Raj Prasai) for the translation of the original book to English, and values the glorious occasion of publishing this English version of Narendra Raj Prasai's *My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai* as a golden opportunity.

• Nai Prakashan

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Foreword

I am delighted to write a few words by way of appreciation about Narendra Raj Prasai's *My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai* translated by Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai from Nepali to English language. Dr. Prasai, son of Narendra Raj Prasai, a renowned writer of Nepal, is a scientist by profession with a doctorate in mitochondrial DNA biology from an American University. Despite his modesty and candid assertion that he is not a professional translator, the high quality of his translation which is a difficult art and requires special skills has impressed me most. He has done a commendable job for which I sincerely compliment him. Elucidating the inspiration to translate this biography, perhaps his first attempt at translation, he writes: "My fathomless love and devotion to my grandmother stimulated me to read her biography that my father wrote. After completing the book, I felt that her heart touching life story should reach far corners of the globe. So, I requested my father that I would like to translate it to English. He was elated when he heard my proposal and nodded his head indicating approval."

The biography testifies not only to Dr. Prasai's genuine love and devotion to his grandmother but also his profound respect and admiration for his father. The first paragraph of Translator's Note opens with a sentence in which Dr. Prasai eulogizes his father as 'the most hardworking and down-to-earth person I

have ever seen in my life.' There can hardly be two opinions about Mr. Narendra Raj Prasai being the most talented biography writer in Nepal. He is a prolific writer with over six and a half dozen publications to his credit, half of which are biographies of people devoted to Nepali language, literature, and culture.

The book under review is, indeed, a heart-felt tribute from a son to his mother in an emotionally moving language. To quote Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai, 'never have I seen a son loving his mother like my father loved his mother.' The biography is replete with instances of several passages glorifying the image of a loving mother, her role as a social worker, a philanthropist and, above all, a true representative of women in Nepali society with their strengths and weaknesses, and their commitment to abide by established norms, values and ideals. Narendra Prasai remembers his mother as a 'rich and generous social worker' who 'never showed arrogance because of the wealth she possessed.' Compassionate as she was, she always helped poor people in the village and no one who sought her help returned empty-handed.

The following description portrays Bhagiratha Prasai as a remarkable lady with multi-dimensional personality. 'My mother was energetic and she worked almost all the time. She possessed different skills and did not like people who sat idle gossiping unnecessarily. According to the time and context of life, there was nothing that she had not done. She was skillful in making straw mats, embroidered mats, and wooden seats, just to name a few. She made our home's fundamental objects. She was an extempore poet as well. Not only that, she used to memorize verses that my father recited from books. She also sang songs in a sweet and melodious tone. During festivities, she enjoyed singing and dancing with her close friends and relatives.' (p.42-43) She was a self-respecting lady who always maintained

her poise and dignity as well as her indomitable spirit with a sense of pride. The following passage describes her qualities: 'No matter how much sorrow, grief and pain she was going through, my mother never bowed in front of anyone. She always held her head high. My father's brothers tried to underestimate her, suppress her, and exploit her, but she never surrendered to anyone. For how much ever long she stayed in Hangpang, my mother lived with pride, honor and dignity.' (p.45)

Narendra's wife Indira Prasai speaks highly of her husband whose love for and attachment to his mother was just exemplary. Narendra quoting his wife writes: 'Narendra and my mother-in-law had miraculously intimate relationship; both loved each other so much. I have neither seen nor heard such love between a son and mother. It was unique to see such affection and love that Narendra had for his mother. That is why I feel that Narendra's behavior toward his mother was both exemplary and remarkable.' (p.54) Howsoever busy, Narendra found time to keep his mother company and to monitor her daily routine from eating, chitchatting and going to bed at night.

Narendra's wife Indira was no less attentive to her mother-in-law who, overwhelmed with so much care and love shown by her daughter-in-law, repeatedly called her 'my mother'. Narendra describes this behavior of his wife towards his mother as outstanding and motivational. Narendra admits: 'When compared to Indira's service towards my mother, mine was almost nothing.' No reader misses the triangular relationship based on mutual love, affection, selfless care and service and, above all, the intimate ties that bind mother, son and the daughter-in-law.

This foreword will be incomplete if I fail to mention a few other outstanding credentials of Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai as a staunch nationalist, a committed monarchist and as one who has shown, as Publisher's Note confirms, 'strong inclination

towards Nepalese language and literature'. I take this opportunity to thank the translator for the honor bestowed on me to write a brief foreword about this excellent English version of his grandmother's biography originally written in Nepali language. I am also thankful to Nai Prakashan for publishing this book about a remarkable lady.

• Prof. Dr. Mohan P. Lohani
Former Head, Central Department of English,
Tribhuvan University
&
Former Ambassador

Translator's Note

The most hardworking and down-to-earth person I have ever seen in my life is my father – Mr. Narendra Raj Prasai. I have hardly seen him sitting idle. He is a workaholic, devoted to the fields of Nepalese language, literature, and culture. Renowned as the most talented biography writer in Nepal, he has authored more than six and a half dozen books on different genres of literature, of which about thirty are biographies of people dedicated to the fields of Nepalese language, literature, and culture.

This book *My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai* is an English version of my grandmother's biography written originally in Nepalese language by my father. Among all the children, my grandmother loved my father the most and reciprocally my father also loved my grandmother the most. The love for his mother, the roller coaster ride that she went through her life, and all the sacrifices that she made for her children motivated my father to write a biography on my grandmother. To my knowledge, this is the first-ever biography of a mother written by her own son (in native language) that is translated to English by her grandson.

My grandmother stayed with us in Kathmandu for the last twelve years of her life. During that period, I observed genuine efforts that my parents invested to make her life easier and happier. However, after doing all that he could, my father

still says that he is not content with what he did for her. He still regrets that he could have done things better. For example, he regrets that he should not have raised his voice in front of her, even though those were just a few times out of total frustration. He also regrets that he should have spent some more time with her. During that period, my father along with my mother had to work hard to feed eight mouths. So, I repeatedly tell him that he should not feel guilty about anything and the time he spent with her was all that he could give under that circumstance. It is clear to me that he regrets it because he misses her a lot. My father treated my grandmother like a Goddess when she was alive. And ever since she left this world, he has been worshipping her. Every day he bows down in front of her portraits, gets her blessing, and then only starts his day.

I also had a pure and unique relationship with my grandmother. I was devoted and obedient to her. The love between us was genuine and mutual. We kissed each other's cheeks every day. Sitting by her side and chatting with her had become my every day's chore. During most of our chitchats, she would mention how she made her home and orchard in Salbari like a paradise. Her ultimate wish was to breathe her last breath in Salbari, Jhapa (a district in Nepal). But her villainous youngest son and daughter-in-law made sure that her wish remained just a wish, impossible to be fulfilled. It was, however, a blessing in disguise for us that my grandmother passed away at *Nai Griha* (Nai home) in my parents' arms. Even though my grandmother's physical body has mingled with the universe, my devotion to her is eternal. Like my father, I remember her every day, bow my head in front of her pictures, get her blessing, and then only start my day.

I was raised in a family that worshipped the Nepalese language, literature, and culture. In a home where both parents

are litterateurs, a family member automatically gets influenced to become one. In this regard, I still remember writing a poem about a new year when I was around eight years old. I, however, am not a full-time writer like my parents; I write only when something touches my heart. Neither am I a professional translator; I am a scientist by profession. I have earned a Ph.D. in mitochondrial DNA replication and repair from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Shreveport, USA. My field of interest is biology and as can be expected, I hardly read literary books. However, my fathomless love and devotion to my grandmother stimulated me to read her biography that my father wrote. After completing the book, I felt that her heart-touching life story should reach far corners of the globe. So, I requested my father that I would like to translate it to English. He was elated when he heard my proposal and nodded his head indicating approval.

Illustrating the ups and downs that she experienced throughout her life, this book depicts my grandmother as the epitome of Nepalese women who was born and raised during Ranacracy. This book also reveals a pure love between a son and his mother. Never have I seen a son loving his mother like my father loved his mother. Maybe the aroma of that love also motivated me to translate the biography of my grandmother that my father wrote. Even though the translation may not give the exact fragrance as the original, the translated version can provide a good sense of understanding of the original contents to the readers. As English is an international language, translation in English means my grandmother's life history is not just confined to communities speaking Nepalese language but can reach English-speaking communities throughout the world.

In the end, I would like to sincerely thank my father Mr. Narendra Raj Prasai for giving me this opportunity to

translate his book written originally in Nepalese language. I would also like to thank my mother Mrs. Indira Prasai for her constant love and support. I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Mohan Lohani (former ambassador to Bangladesh and a widely respected diplomat) for writing a foreword to this translated book. Last but not least, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Mr. Anu Raj Joshi (eldest son of Century Person Satya Mohan Joshi) and also to Ms. Pimala Neupane (Lecturer, Tribhuvan University) for going through the manuscript and providing me valuable feedback.

• **Kanchanjunga Prasai, Ph.D.**
(Mitochondrial DNA Biology, USA)

My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai

Birth of My Parents and Their Proposed Wedding While Still Inside Their Mother's Womb

In late 1918, Nara Dhoj Prasai from Hangpang, Taplegunj district, and Prem Lal Upreti from Ewa, Tehrahthum district got acquainted with each other in Amini, Dhankuta district while dealing with legal procedures. Because the nature of their work was essentially similar, the intimacy between Prasai and Upreti thrived, such that they started taking interest in each other's families. They also revealed details about their spouses, both of whom were pregnant at that time. They then took a pledge that if their unborn offspring were born with the opposite sex, they would tie their wedding knot later in their childhood. In due time, a girl in Upreti's family and a boy in Prasai's family were born.

My mother Bhagiratha Prasai was born at the break of dawn on May 21, 1919 in Ewa, Tehrathum. My maternal grandfather, Prem Lal Upreti, had two wives and my mother was born as the third child from his first wife, Kaushalya Upreti.

My father Jaya Prasad Prasai was born a month ahead of my mother. My paternal grandfather, Nara Dhoj Prasai, also had two wives and his first wife, Shiva Maya Prasai, gave birth to my father as her third child on April 11, 1919 in Hangpang, Taplejung.

As vowed formerly by my grandfathers, Jaya Prasad Prasai and Bhagiratha Upreti, each seven-years-old, tied a wedding knot in 1926.

My grandfathers Nara Dhoj Prasai and Prem Lal Upreti usually met in Dhankuta. After tying the wedding knot between their children, my grandfathers supported each other in every possible way. In addition to being fearless and bold, both were clear and transparent with one another. They made sure that they had similar work schedules so that they could meet each other during their visits to offices and courts.

My mother shared her life details with my wife, Indira Prasai. With a collection of such details, Indira wrote a book entitled *My Mother-In-Law* and published it in 2008 through Nai Prakashan (Nai Academy). In that book, my mother remembered her wedding details as: "We got married when we were seven-years-old. Before marriage, I usually wore an ankle-length skirt. But for the wedding, I was told to wear a *gunyoo* (a sarong-like garment) and a blouse. According to our customs and tradition, I was sent back to my maternal home after the wedding rituals. It was when I reached thirteen years of age, I was sent from Ewa to my husband's house in Hangpang."

Before the 1950s, it was burdensome for a woman to manage her household. My mother was raised during such a time period. Regardless from a rich or poor family, a woman was treated almost like an animal. In this context, one of our close relatives, Ganesh Bahadur Prasai, has mentioned in Indira Prasai's book *My Mother-In-Law*, "After analyzing almost nine decades of ups and downs experienced by Bhagiratha Prasai, it will not be a lie to say that she has gone through a harsh roller coaster." *Brahmins* (a priestly class) and *Kshatriyas* (a warrior race) societies during *Ranacracy* (the

ruling system of Nepal in which the prime minister had more power than the king) said to their daughters, "Manage your home if you can; if you cannot, then jump into a river and die." My mother was the epitome of a girl who was born and raised during that period. Despite many hardships, my mother accepted all the challenges and progressively marched forward. This real-life heroine (Bhagiratha Prasai) had a fearsome personality and as a lonely lioness, she singlehandedly took care of her entire family.

Story of My Father and Grandfathers

My paternal grandfather, Nara Dhoj Prasai, was a rich and renowned person of the Attharai area of Taplejung district. Whenever he had to go out of his home, he would wear a *daura suruwal* (a traditional Nepalese dress for men) with a waistband where he kept his *kukri* (a type of machete associated with Nepalese culture). With a smart and tall figure, he looked stunning in that getup. According to my mother, whatever he said became law in his house. His sons could hardly speak in front of him. In that exploitation era, he was regarded as a community judge.

The supremacy of Nara Dhoj Prasai was known to all in that region. In terms of wealth, he was counted at the top. In that period, paper currencies were not invented yet; only metal coins were in use. Because of an excessively large number of coins, we did not count coins with hands. Metal coins were put into a *pathi* (a measuring vessel). We then kept track of the number of times the coins were transferred from pathi into a *ghampo* (a much bigger metal jar). In this context, my mother said, "The whole counting process was cumbersome; I used to get tired while counting coins."

The birth of my grandfather, Nara Dhoj Prasai, has a story of its own. He was born as a result of his father's (my great-grandfather's) kindheartedness and heroic deeds. My

great-grandfather Nanda Mani Prasai enjoyed farming and cultivation. He was never dependent on laborers and servants when it came to farming and cultivation. Because of that, he was always excited and optimistic about his work. One day my great-grandfather went to see *Bhanjyang Khet* (a cultivated land named Bhanjyang), situated across *Chuwa river* (a river named Chuwa). While returning from Bhanjyang Khet, he noticed a flash flood in the Chuwa river. He saw two flood victims in the raging river. His kindhearted nature did not allow him to go home neglecting the scene. With a hope to rescue them, he went back near the river and saw one victim anchored to a small bush. He was able to get hold of that victim, who happened to be a lady. He then tied the lady with his waistband and pulled her ashore. However, he could not save the other victim, who was swept away by the river.

My great-grandfather then wrapped his waistband around the stomach of the lady and made her lie down with her stomach facing against the shore. He then gently pressed her back periodically to make her vomit the water that she drank from the flooded river. At that moment, she could not speak. For some time she opened her eyes but she was not in full consciousness. Her clothes were torn and she was almost naked. My great-grandfather tore his waistband and wrapped her body with it. He then waited for her consciousness to return to normal.

After coming back to consciousness, the lady burst into tears. The person who was swept away was her husband with whom she had recently got married. That evil day, they were returning home after finishing work in their cultivated land. While trying to cross a ford, they both were swept away by the river. Her husband got swirled in a whirlpool, which then threw him away. After that, no one could rescue her husband. She could not stop crying because of the pain that she had from her husband's loss.

The lady who was washed away by the river was a daughter of the *Bhandaris* (a Brahmin) and her name was Dev Kala. My great-grandfather could not just leave Dev Kala in that lonely place. Even though her life was saved, she was crying incessantly because of the grief of the loss of her husband. After tending her affectionately, my great-grandfather took her to his home.

Following deliverance from the flooded river, Dev Kala entered my great-grandfather's house. After advice and direction from my great-grandfather, Dev Kala performed her husband's funeral ceremony. Without any hesitation, my great-grandfather took care of all the expenses incurred by Dev Kala for the rituals. After the funeral, Dev Kala did not want to leave my great-grandfather's home. It felt as if she had decided to devote the rest of her life to her life savior. Soon, she became involved in household activities, as told repeatedly by my mother Bhagiratha Prasai.

My great-grandfather Nanda Mani Prasai took good care of Dev Kala. He regularly checked if she was eating properly or not. My great-grandmother Hari Maya was noticing his affectionate and humane behavior towards Dev Kala. So, my great-grandmother suggested to my great-grandfather to adopt Dev Kala as his second wife. On this note, Hari Maya told her husband, "You saved Dev Kala's life. Apart from her husband, only you have seen her naked. According to our religion and culture, if we help women like Dev Kala, we get an opportunity to purify our souls. A religious, humane, and literate person like you will not only receive religious merit if you accept her as your wife but will also mean welfare for her."

My great-grandfather accepted Hari Maya's proposal and he formally accepted Dev Kala as his second wife. My grandfather Nara Dhoj Prasai was born from Dev Kala as a

second child. The first child born from her was Daata Ram. After Nara Dhoj, two more children born from her were Laxman and Lok Nath, making a total of four children from my great-grandmother Dev Kala. From my first great-grandmother, Hari Maya, five children were born, namely: Roop Narayan, D. Rama Chandra, Ranga Lal, Shu. Pasupati, and D. Bishnu Lal. Thus, my great-grandfather had nine sons in total.

My grandfather Nara Dhoj Prasai also had two wives– Shiva Maya and Ruk Mini. He had five sons and eleven daughters. Shiva Maya (first wife) was the mother of four sons (Khada Nanda, Benu Prasad, Jaya Prasad, and Roop Narayan), and six daughters (Tulasa Bhattarai, Indira Bhattarai, Hima Devi Mainali, Laxmi Chundal, Ganga Maya Sangraula, and Hari Maya Thapaliya). Rukmini (second wife) was the mother of one son (Maan Bahadur), and five daughters (Devi Khatri, Rama Devi Gautam, Padma Dahal, Saraswati Dangi, and Sanu Maya Katuwal).

Among five sons of Nara Dhoj, the eldest son Khada Nanda was nicknamed Youdhisthir (similar to the eldest of five Pandava princes in the Mahabharata), the second Maan Bahadur was nicknamed Bhim (the second Pandava prince) and my father Jaya Prasad was nicknamed Arjun (the third Pandava prince). Maan Bahadur was born to the second wife of Nara Dhoj Prasai. The trio was like having three bodies with a single soul. Among them, if someone said something, the remaining two brothers would nod their heads in agreement without any hesitation. My father Jaya Prasad was more intelligent and knowledgeable than any normal people of his age. So, his elders called him Jiju. Progressively he started becoming popular as Jiju for all. Later, his name 'Jaya' started fading away and 'Jiju' got established.

Like the trio (Khada Nanda, Maan Bahadur, and Jaya Prasad) who roamed around as a single spirit, the duo brothers,

Benu Prasad and Roop Narayan, also had a good understanding between them. Indeed, the thoughts and feelings of those two brothers were also firmly connected. During that time, the brothers used to live together as a single united family until getting married. After marriage, however, most sons chose to start a nuclear family. In other words, a newly wedded couple lived separately in a different house. In that way, Khada Nanda, Maan Bahadur, and my father Jaya Prasad each started a nuclear family after getting married. However, my grandfather Nara Dhoj Prasai stayed together with my father's elder brother Benu Prasad and younger brother Roop Narayan.

The trio spent a lot of their money on religious and social works. As an example, Khada Nanda, Maan Bahadur, and Jaya Prasad (aka Youdhisthir, Bhim, and Arjun) traveled on foot from Hangpang to Kathmandu as pilgrims to *Pasupatinath temple* (the foremost Hindu temple of Nepal). After returning from Kathmandu, my father explained in detail to my mother about the glory, greatness, and significance of Pasupatinath. In the same year, i.e., 1938, on the day of *Krishna Asthami* (birth anniversary of Lord Krishna), Bishnu Bhakta Prasai was born as the eldest child to my parents. With utter delight, my father asked my mother, "What shall I give you as a reward on the occasion of giving birth to our first child?" My mother requested her husband to establish, if he could, a small temple like Pasupatinath within our house premises. To fulfill my mother's wish, the trio worked together and devoted their time and money for the construction of Shivalaya temple. As a result, a Shivalaya with four doors in four directions (a replica of Pasupatinath temple) was established to the east of our house within house premises. In our Shivalaya, Puspalal Acharya and his sons Gobinda Acharya and Maheswar Acharya were appointed as priests. The priests were given 15 muri (1 muri ~160 kg) paddy each year. Our home's main priest was Rangalal Acharya.

My father and his two elder brothers also built a guesthouse near the temple within our house premises. The guesthouse was roofed with a zinc-coated corrugated metal sheet. They also constructed a small pond just below the Shivalaya. The pond had three faucets. They also took lead for the construction of roads in different parts of Atthrai, Taplejung. Before 1950, the three brothers were firmly established as social workers in Attharai of Taplejung and Tehrathum districts.

My father and his elder brother Maan Bahadur spent most of their time together. Both had high profile personalities. Accordingly, Ganesh Bahadur Prasai has mentioned in Indira's book (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008), "I met Maan Bahadur and Jaya Prasad for the first time in 1937 while they came to visit my father in our home. Those two sons of Nara Dhoj were already famous across the Dhankuta district. In addition to recognizing them as powerful and helpful personalities by Chief District Officer, the two brothers were also regarded as having heroic characteristics. People said, "Who could match the courage of Maan Bhahadur and the intelligence of Jiju?" With medium height and weight, both brothers looked smart in white *daura suruwal* and black coat. As Maan Bhahadur had brown complexion, Jiju with a comparatively fair complexion looked further attractive. Later in my life, I got close to B.P. Koirala (probably the most popular politician of Nepal). During meetings with B.P., I felt as if I was having meetings with Jiju. Both Jiju Prasai and B.P. Koirala were artistic and smart with attractive personalities. If you see one, you would feel as if you have seen the other. The only difference between B.P. and Jiju was that in B.P., one could find the courage and bravery of Maan Bahadur in addition to patience and intellect of Jiju."

My father's eldest brother Khada Nanda passed away in 1940. After completing thirteen days long funeral ceremony, my

father's elder brother Maan Bahadur left his home saying that he was going to visit his parents-in-law, but he never returned. Lacking proper care and guidance from his elder brothers, Jiju looked like a disabled person who could never shine like B.P. Koirala. Instead, my father started getting close to *sadhus* (people who renounce life, becoming a wandering hermit seeking moksha or salvation) who came to Shivalaya. It felt as if he was chained to their company. After losing both the brothers, my father did not want to stay in the worldly illusion of love; so he appeared like a sadhu. Gradually, the light of the trio (Youdhishir, Bhim, and Arjun) started fading away.

Descendants of My Parents

My father Jaya Prasad Prasai 'Jiju' had a sound financial status. Before 1933, his house had a zinc-coated corrugated metal roof. During that era, such a roof was called chyadar and we were the first to have chyadar in that remote region. Later, his elder brother Benu Prasad also installed chyadar in his house, and only we Prasai brothers were recognized as having chyadar roofs. After us, our neighbor Dil Bahadur Bista also installed chyadar in his house. Following that, our village was recognized as chyadar village.

My father was not only rich but also fond of several materialistic items. He owned four horses, and for riding, he chose different horses on different days. He also had a harmonium, a gramophone, and a mantle lamp petromax, all of which he brought from Kasi (Varanasi), India. During that time, such things were rare in our village and neighboring villages. As per their necessity, my father used to lend those instruments free of charge to the people in need. So during weddings and any other cultural gatherings, my father would help people in need with whatever instruments he had. According to my eldest brother Bishnu Bhakta Prasai, when the first petromax reached Hangpang, villagers from our as well as neighboring villages came to see illumination from the petromax.

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My mother raised her children in a well-disciplined manner. She did not hesitate to punish her stubborn, quarrelsome, and naughty children. If her simple beating technique did not work, then she would keep them inside a sack and seal the mouth of the sack with a rope, and leave it on the ground. During meal breaks, she would open the mouth of the sack and after eating she would put them back inside the sack and leave them on the ground. Often, I failed to obey her strict rules, so I frequently ended up inside the sack.

From my parents, six sons and one daughter were born in Hangpang at Jiju house. A short introduction to my parents' descendants is as follows:

Bishnu Bhakta Prasai

As the first child to my parents, Bishnu Bhakta Prasai, was born on the day of Krishna Asthami in 1938. During his *nuaran* (a name-giving ceremony performed within eleven days after birth), my parents donated *Soyambho khet* (a cultivated piece of land named Soyambho) to a Brahmin. Also, after he was born, a Shivalaya resembling the Pasupatinath temple in Kathmandu was established within our home premises. Following the construction of the Shivalaya, our home used to get flooded with sadhus, so we built a separate guesthouse for them to stay.

When my eldest brother was ten years old, he got married to Bhagiratha Mainali from Attharai, Choppur. Soon after his marriage, our nation went through the 1950 revolution. Unable to handle those circumstances, my eldest sister-in-law went to Assam in India, where she stayed with her parents for many years.

Because he was unsure if his wife would ever return from India, my eldest brother married Bhagiratha Subedi on January 25, 1959. This was what my mother said about my eldest sister-in-law, "The name of my eldest daughter-in-law is also Bhagiratha. She is a simple and positive lady who does not even like to hear anyone's backbiting. If there is a dispute between brothers, my eldest daughter-in-law sits in the middle and calms them down. A daughter-in-law should be like that. Indeed, my eldest daughter-in-law is patient and brave." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

From my eldest brother and his wife, four daughters and two sons were born. All four daughters have received a master's degree and all of them have established a decent household. They are obedient to their parents and provide full support to them.

The eldest daughter Puspa got married to Bhupati Jung Thapa. The couple has two daughters– Isha and Anisha. The second daughter Muna got married to Madan Kharel, from whom one daughter Manaswi and one son Amun were born. The third daughter Rita got married to Ram Prasad Phuyal, from whom two sons, Ishan and Arpan were born. The fourth daughter Ramita got married to Kumar Sitaula. Ramita gave birth to one daughter Tejaswi and one son Darshan.

Out of two sons that my eldest brother had, the elder one, Sagar, married Binita Kharel from whom one daughter Sandhya and one son Sandeep were born. The second son Sandesh is established as the pillar of the household. He is also his parents' most obedient and trusted child. Diligent in his work, Sandesh obtained the Master of Engineering from Norway. He got married to Sudha Sharma and currently, both are studying in the United States of America. Sandesh is a graduate assistant at Louisiana State University-Shreveport, USA

and Sudha is a Ph.D. candidate at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Shreveport, USA.

Nira Sitaula

My parents' only daughter Nira was born on January 5, 1941. Before and after her marriage, Nira served our family with all her heart and soul. She got married to Nil Krishna Sitaula from Mulpani, Tehrathum. From them, ten daughters and a son were born of which four daughters passed away during their childhood. Out of the six remaining daughters, the second daughter Guna did not get married. The first daughter Chetan got married to Janak Adhikari. Chetan gave birth to two sons, Ramesh and Ranjan. Ramesh Adhikari wedded Nita Ojha and from them, one daughter was born. Chetan also gave birth to a daughter, Ramita, who departed this world at the age of twenty-one years. My sister's third daughter Muna got married to Shridhar Bhusal. From them one son Bibek was born, who is studying in Australia. The fourth daughter Chhuna got married to Toya Nath Odari. From them, two sons Abhishek and Aakash were born and both are studying in Australia. Abhishek got married to Simran Subedi. My sister's fifth daughter is Tika, whose marriage did not last long. Currently, Tika is in Dubai to earn a living. Tika's daughter Shristi and son Sandesh are staying with my sister Nira. My sister's sixth daughter Saraswati got married to Bhupal Chimariya. From them, two daughters Sabhupa and Sachiva, and one son Sachin were born. Sabhupa is studying in Australia. My sister's only son Arjun is earning a living in Australia.

Nira's husband, Nil Krishna, passed away on November 11, 2004 in Jhapa. After that, my sister moved to Dhapakhel, Lalitpur, in the Kathmandu Valley with support from her children and their spouses.

Padma Raj Prasai

As the second son of my parents, Padma Raj Prasai, was born on March 27, 1942. He was brilliant right from his childhood. During the 1950 revolution, rich people in the hilly regions were being attacked because of which we were forced to leave behind our houses and other properties. Padma accompanied others in the family while leaving the hilly region for the *terai region* (plain region). After walking for five days from Hangpang, they reached *Birtamod Bazaar* (a town in the Jhapa district), Jhapa. A few days later, Padma got infected with malaria and started getting high fever. When things calmed down in the hilly regions, they went back. After reaching Hangpang, Padma became bedridden. Two years later, when he was eleven years old, his physical body left the world. He passed away on the day of *Teej* (a festival celebrated by women in the worship of God Shiva and Goddess Parvati) in 1953. Because of that sad event, my mother never participated in or celebrated Teej festival.

Dirgha Raj Prasai

My parents' third son, Dirgha Raj Prasai, was born on May 3, 1943. He obtained an M.A. degree from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Recognized as a sharp writer in National Panchayat (Assembly), Dirgha was also regarded as an honest and patriotic politician. His work was well recognized as the king then honored him twice with membership of the National Panchayat (Assembly).

Dirgha used to sincerely love our family. He was obedient and loyal to our mother. As a good-hearted person, he was dedicated to looking after and reviving our family. He knew that I was involved in the Jhapa Movement. My mother and my sister thought that police would kill me because of my involvement in the Movement, so they forced me to go to Kathmandu. In Kathmandu, I, along with my stepbrother, Laxmi

Prasad Prasai (see chapter 5), stayed with support from Dirgha. I was obedient to Dirgha. But after his marriage, the couple could not withstand us and I could not stand the couple either, so I left their place. But Laxmi stayed with them till the next year bearing humiliation and insult from them. Dirgha was dedicated and devoted to our family even for a few years after marriage. However, his family devotion started declining with the passage of time. It seemed as if he was slipping away from us. Afterward, he became alone, like an isolated person.

Dirgha got married to Sanu Baba Dhakal on July 14, 1975. From them, one daughter and one son were born. Daughter Tista got married to Dev Raj Joshi and son Kangada to Divya Dhakal. My sister-in-law Sanu Baba passed away on April 24, 2018 in Kathmandu.

Bharat Raj Prasai

My parents' fourth son, Bharat Raj Prasai, was born on November 25, 1951. He was simple and straightforward right from his childhood. He got married to Rupa Siwakoti, a daughter of Agni Prasad Siwakoti from Jhapa on December 15, 1973. My mother often said about her fourth daughter-in-law, 'Bharat's wife also says good about everyone. She is also a simple and straightforward woman'. (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

The couple struggled early in their lives regarding financial status but gradually they stood up firmly on their own feet. They had three daughters and one son. Eldest daughter Rekha passed away due to heart complications when she was sixteen-years old. In her memory, Bharat and Rupa established a prize in Jhapa named Rekha Memorial Trust. They gave away the prize annually to a student who scored the highest marks in *SLC* (School Leaving Certificate) in the Jhapa district. A few years

later, Bharat and his family moved to Kathmandu. After migrating to Kathmandu, Bharat and Rupa maintained the continuity of the prize by handing over 'Nai Rekha Bidhya Padak' (Nai Rekha Knowledge Medal) to a school student scoring the highest marks in the Sitapaila area of Kathmandu district. Moreover, with financial assistance from Bharat-Rupa, Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai, and Nai couple, Nai Prakashan established 'Nai Rekha Prize' in 2009. The prize is given away biennially to well-established women dedicated to the field of Nepali literature and includes sixty thousand Nepalese rupees.

Bharat and Rupa now have two daughters, Roshan and Rachana. Both are obedient to their parents and both have a master's degree. Roshan got married to Yogesh Mainali, from whom one son Hritik was born. Rachana got married to Narrotam Dhakal and from them one son Riyansh was born.

Bharat and Rupa have one son. His pet name is Raju and his official name is Keshar. Dr. Keshar Prasai earned a Ph.D. in Chemistry from Kansas State University in the USA. He is now the vice-principal of Kantipur Engineering College situated in Lalitpur district. He married Srijana Mainali, from whom one son Shuvam was born. Srijana obtained the Masters in Nursing from Maharajgunj Medical Campus, Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu.

Narendra Raj Prasai

As the fifth son of my parents, I was born on April 11, 1955. I spent most of my childhood in Jiju house. I studied up to fifth grade in Saraswati High School, which was located near Jiju house. Then one day, my mother suggested to me to visit the terai region. After reaching terai, my eldest brother and sister-in-law did not allow me to leave them, so I stayed in Jhapa with them. Then, I got enrolled in Sanischare High School in sixth grade.

After migrating to Jhapa, I frequently sent letters to my mother with a depressing note, "Mother either you come to Jhapa or call me there in the hilly region." Because of my stubbornness and persistence, my mother also migrated to Jhapa. When I was in eighth grade, I participated in the Jhapa Movement. Because of such activity, my mother and elder sister Nira became anxious about my safety. They wanted me to leave Jhapa and migrate to Kathmandu. With their support and advice, I came to Kathmandu and got enrolled in Padmodaya High School in ninth grade. I, then, became Secretary General of Kathmandu Valley Inter-High School Students' Committee and later I was elected its President. As a student of Padmodaya High School, I took SLC examination from Attharai's Tri Mohan High School. After SLC, I got enrolled in Intermediate of Arts in Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus. During that period, I married a girl from a different caste (inter-caste marriage). In due time, I completed my Intermediate of Arts degree. For my bachelor's degree, I joined Trichandra Campus, and during that period i.e., in 1979 nationwide referendum took place. At that time, the Royal Commission dismissed Nationalist Independent Student Counsel. In due course of time, with advice from renowned politicians like Surya Bahadur Thapa, Ram Hari Sharma, Rajeswor Devkota, and Singha Dhoj Khadka, 'Nepal National Student Union' was established, and I was elected Central President of that Union.

I received a B.A. degree from Trichandra Campus following which I got enrolled in Nepal Public Administration Campus for an M.A. degree. Meanwhile, my son Kanchanjunga was born on May 29, 1981 and I got engaged in nurturing my family. Due to lack of time, financial scarcity, and other reasons, I could not complete the final exam of the masters degree.

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In 1985, Queen Aaiswarya summoned and told me, "Come and work for me!" During that time, the queen was the Chairperson of the Goodwill Planning Committee, where she nominated me as a member. Also, as per the queen's wish, I was appointed the editor of *Upakar* (Goodwill) trimonthly magazine. Impressed by my work, the queen appointed me Secretary General of the Information and Publication Committee in the Social Service National Coordination Council headed by the queen herself.

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My first marriage crashed like a house of cards, as my ex-wife's interests, conduct, and behavior did not match with my own. Even though we shared the same roof, our hearts and souls were miles apart. There was no love between us. So, we discussed changing paths in our lives and with our son Kanchanjunga's consent, we got divorced.

After Indira Prasai came into my life, everything seemed beautiful. Having known each other for about four years, Indira and I finally decided to get married. Because we both were associated with Nepalese literature, we established '*Nai Prakashan*' (Nai Academy) by combining initial letters of our names ('Na' from *Na*rendra and 'I' from *I*ndira) on January 29, 1996. The primary aim of Nai Prakashan is to promote the propagation of Nepalese language, literature, and culture all around the globe. Identifying talents linked with Nepalese literature, arts, culture, social work, science, sports, etc., and honoring them is another main objective of Nai Prakashan.

Ganga Raj Prasai

My youngest brother, Ganga Raj Prasai, was born on April 26, 1957. Before his marriage, he was regarded as a helper to all in the family. Even a few years after marriage, he

showed extreme devotion to my mother. His sacrifice for my mother and outstanding household service impressed me. So, I proposed to my mother, "Ganga's kids are poor in education. I do not see them doing well in a government school here in Salbari. After all, Ganga also did not study well. So, let's admit his kids in Kankai Boarding School." Finally, we admitted his three children to Kankai Boarding School in Birtamod. Regarding this matter, I did not even bother to ask my eldest brother and got Ganga's children enrolled in the boarding school.

Some years after marriage, slowly my youngest brother had started becoming hostile to my mother. He started getting inclined towards his wife Ram Kumari Kharel and his in-laws. These were my mother's words about her youngest son and his wife, "Initially my youngest daughter-in-law seemed to be good, so I handed over my whole household to her. Then slowly a distance started building which later extended to such an extent that they wanted me out of my house. Now see! I have become like a homeless, haven't I?" (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

My youngest brother had two sons Sankar and Sangam, and one daughter Sarmila. Sankar got married to Srijana Rokka, and from this couple, one daughter Shilu was born. Soon after their marriage, Ganga sent his elder son Sankar to Dubai to earn a living. Sadly, soon after he reached Dubai, Sankar passed away mysteriously. Since Ganga and his family did not find Sankar's corpse even after one month of his death, they cremated *kush* (a sacred grass that is used in religious ceremonies) and performed his funeral rites. To date, his corpse has not arrived.

My Mother's Public Service and Her Agony

Because my mother was a rich and generous social worker, she was well known and had earned huge prestige in our village. She never showed arrogance because of the wealth she possessed. She had genuine feelings for helping others. She wiped tears from the eyes of poor people in the village. Anyone who came to our home asking for something, my mother ensured that s/he never returned empty-handed. Indeed, my mother was a compassionate person in her locality.

My mother was illiterate, but she always believed that education is an essential part of life. So, she always wanted her children and every child in the village to be educated. It was my mother who dispersed the radiance of education in that area. In this context, my parents established a school in our warehouse during *Saraswati Puja* (a festival worshipping Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and arts) of 1954. Before the establishment of that school, my eldest brother Bishnu Bhakta Prasai together with other relatives went to Saradha High School located at *Chuhaan Dada* (a hill named Chuhaan). During that period, we did not have a school in our village. It was extremely difficult to gather students, as there was no such tradition of sending children to school. Because of that, even if a school was established, children did not like to go to school. We had to entice potential

students with something for them to attend school. So my mother invented an idea to gather potential students: she lured children from wealthy families by giving them sweets, whereas she arranged meals for children from poor families.

Children from different parts of our village started coming to our warehouse school. Students, namely Khagendra Prasai (later a minister), Bidhya Raj Prasai, Dirgha Raj Prasai [(later a member of National Panchayat (Assembly)], Nanda Kumar Prasai (later a member of Constituent Assembly), Dev Krishna Prasai, Jog Maya Prasai, etc., studied in the school that my parents established. To teach English, Bhawani Subedi, who had passed only eight grade, was brought from Tehrathum. Later, he was told to leave the school because of his misconduct.

The number of students in our warehouse school increased progressively. With the interest and involvement of my uncles Benu Prasad and Roop Narayan, a school 'Devi Primary School' was established in the eastern region near Shivalaya temple. For the establishment of the school, Khanuprudae 'Rambabu', a son of Lieutenant Devi Prasad Prasai, donated land. To teach English in the school, Rudra Narayan Kayastha (who had passed only tenth grade) from Bihar, India, and Ram Krishna Sharma (with an Intermediate of Arts certificate) from Bhagalpur, India, were appointed. During that time, there was a 'Saraswati Primary School' in the next village at Devi Than. Later, that school was upgraded as Saraswati DSB (District Soldier Board) Middle School, and Devi Primary School of our village merged with the former. Before the two schools merged, the school in our village was called Brahmin school and the school in the next village was called *Limbu* (a Kirat community, which resides in Eastern Nepal) school. But after the two schools merged, the dispute over Brahmin and Limbu schools disappeared.

My cousin Krishna Raj Prasai (son of my uncle Khada Nanda Prasai) was the Secretary of Saraswati DSB Middle School. Under his leadership, the school flourished remarkably. He was obedient to my mother. Because of that, it became easy for my mother to render educational service. Even after the death of my father, my mother continued free hostel service at 'Jiju house', which was my mother's own house. A former politician and Secretary of His Majesty's Government of Nepal Tej Bahadur Prasai has stated about my mother in Indira's book like this: "Even though illiterate, she was an intelligent and sharp woman. With her life full of struggles, she also experienced abundant heart-warming incidents, which are admirable."

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During her youth, my mother was a healthy woman. After feeding her breast milk to her children, she would go to her neighbors' homes. From the milk that remained after feeding her children, she used to feed infants whose mothers produced less milk. She never discriminated between the rich and the poor; she was never biased. Whenever she noticed injustice being done to someone, she would go forward to give him/her appropriate justice. Indeed, the oppressors were frightened because of her dauntless nature. On the other hand, people who knew about her benevolent nature bowed in front of her with reverence.

My mother was energetic and she worked almost all the time. She possessed different skills and did not like people who sat idle gossiping unnecessarily. According to the time and context of life, there was nothing that she had not done. She was skillful in making straw mats, embroidered mats, and wooden seats, just to name a few. She made our home's fundamental household objects. She was an extempore poet as well. Not only that, she used to memorize verses that my father recited from books. She also sang songs in a sweet and melodious tone. During festivities, she enjoyed singing and dancing with her close friends and relatives.

My mother was interested in animal husbandry too. Irrespective of where we stayed (whether in the hilly region or terai region), a freshly calved cow or buffalo would be in our cowshed. She milked those animals and made yogurt and ghee from the milk. She also had the skill, energy, and eagerness in building an orchard. Whether it was in Taplejung or Jhapa, she built attractive orchards. Of our cultivated land in Jhapa, about one *biga* (a fifth of an acre) constituted our orchard. She enjoyed giving fruits to school children and other people who came to ask for fruits. She always became happy and satisfied when she had the opportunity to give something to someone. In this context, she said, "We should not disappoint people when they come with expectations; we should always try to make them happy."

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My father had brain, filled with general knowledge, facts, and details. Social service and educational service were his favorite subjects. He was an admirer of songs and music. Most of the time in school, he took the lead in daily prayers.

After Shivalaya was built, sadhus often came to our home, and my father gradually developed intimacy with them. So, before I was born, those sadhus were my father's best companions. It almost took ten years for my mother to redirect my father's heart towards his home and family.

After dissociating himself from his relationship with sadhus, my father gradually became weak. He did not care about his family or household. He lacked the energy and courage to do anything. Maybe he had Alzheimer's disease as his brain seemed functioning slowly. That is why he started feeling lonely and enjoyed solitary confinement. Slowly, he became like a deceased person. Eventually, he passed away on June 18, 1963 in Jiju house.

My mother became a widow when she was forty-four years old. Because Nepal has a patriarchal social system, our social status declined after my father passed away. Also, my mother started facing financial crisis following my father's death. In this context, Nanda Kumar Prasai (a close relative) wrote, "Then her relatives started casting evil eyes on her property. In that condition also, she not only managed to protect and nurture her children but also her co-wife and stepchildren." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai; also see chapter 5 of this book)

My mother experienced important phases of life in Hangpang. Initially, she experienced happiness and joy in that place, but later her life changed its direction to torture and pain. She experienced the meaning of joyous as well as painful life. It seemed like a bold heroine from a prosperous family suddenly went through a mudslide from which it was extremely difficult for her to escape.

Social assumptions during that period were cruel and harsh. After *kanyadaan* (a ritual where the bride's parents hand over their daughter to the groom) of their daughters, the brides' parents would not take any responsibility for their daughters. A similar situation was witnessed in my mother's case. When my mother was sent to the groom's house, she was told, "Take good care of your family! If you cannot do that, then jump into a river and die." After her husband passed away, her financial condition got worse and she kept on struggling. However, she never asked for any help from her parents, no matter how much suffering she found herself in. The combination of sorrow, distress, and pain had made her life miserable. In this context, Khanuprudae Rambabu (a close relative) has written, "Bhagiratha Prasai has experienced extreme happiness as well as sadness in her life." Even though she was living in poverty, my mother focused on rescuing herself and her children from such a harsh financial crisis.

No matter how much sorrow, grief, and pain she was going through, my mother never bowed in front of anyone. She always held her head high. My father's brothers tried to underestimate her, suppress her, and exploit her, but she never surrendered to anyone. For how much ever long she stayed in Hangpang, my mother lived with pride, honor, and dignity.

My Mother's Co-wife

My mother was a pragmatic woman. She was devoted to my father and loved him with all her heart. Nonetheless, she became a victim of prevailing social malpractices, as she had to endure a co-wife.

My grandmother Shiva Maya had an angry temperament. If she decided to do something, she would do it. Her daughters-in-law were not allowed to look into her eyes. She treated her daughters-in-law cruelly. Because of that, my mother had to endure a co-wife. Essentially, what happened was, my grandmother's *maiti* (parents' home of a married woman), the Siwakotis, and my mother's maiti, the Upretis, had a dispute regarding a Upreti lady who got married to a Siwakoti. Later the husband died. After that, she was ill-treated in her husband's house. When the Upretis came to know about this, they did not stay silent. The Upretis went to a court and gave justice to that poor lady. Because of that incident, my grandmother hated the Upretis, so she brought another wife for my father. Whenever this topic regarding my mother's co-wife arose, my mother said, "The Siwakotis wanted to suppress the Upretis arrogance. So, the Siwakotis instigated my mother-in-law to bring in my co-wife just because I was a daughter of the Upretis'. Then, they quickly brought a girl as my husband's second wife. But how would that event suppress my arrogance? My arrogance did not get suppressed; I was not arrogant in the first place."

As a co-wife to my mother, Divya Rupa Chudal, the youngest daughter of Dadhi Ram Chudal and Biseswara Chudal, was brought into Jiju house from Chuwa, Hangpang. My mother never treated her as a co-wife; my mother loved her as her own sister throughout her life. No one could see any kind of anger, hatred, or jealousy between them. My mother's co-wife was obedient to my mother to the extent that she would not eat food without paying reverence to my mother: i.e., she used to bow and touch my mother's feet with her head to receive a blessing every day before eating. Moreover, she did not start her day without asking my mother about what she should do during the day. One of the reasons for all that was that my father told my stepmother, "It is your responsibility to make my first wife happy. Only then, I will be happy with you." Despite that, my stepmother sometimes did get mad at my mother and showed unruly behavior towards her.

From my stepmother, three daughters: Chandra Wati, Ram Kumari, and Gauri, and one son, Laxmi Prasad Prasai, were born. Laxmi Prasad was initially a teacher and a journalist but later he became active in social work and politics. After her son was born, my stepmother wished to stay in a separate house, a proposal to which my father agreed. And I was born after my stepmother left Jiju house.

After my father's death, my stepmother also faced trauma and psychological pain. That time, she was staying across Chuwa. Seeing her misery after my father's death, my mother brought her co-wife in one of the houses in the courtyard, as there were two houses in the courtyard of Jiju house. In addition to guarding and protecting her co-wife, my mother also helped her co-wife to get settled in the new place. My stepbrother, Laxmi Prasad, got educated through my mother. That process continued till he stayed in the hilly region.

My stepmother considered her stepchildren as her own children. We all huddled together with her. After my conscience as an adolescent developed, I began to realize that I should pay reverence to my parents as the first duty in the morning. After my stepmother was brought into our house, I started my day only after paying reverence to my stepmother as well. I felt as if she was not my stepmother. The secret of that intimacy was my mother. My mother always said, "For your father, we two co-wives are equal; never disrespect your stepmother." According to that, our respect for our stepmother increased; she was stepmother just in words, but in our hearts, she was like our real mother.

I was like a spokesman of my stepmother, who, in later days, sometimes cursed my mother. When my stepmother became angry, she would put ashes on her palm, blow, and say, "May I see you and your descendants sweep away like these ashes. May you and your descendants soon suffer from the plague." After hearing such harsh words, my mother would also retaliate with bitter words. Then I would step in between them and try to calm them. Maybe because of that my stepmother loved me more than her other stepchildren. That was what my wife Indira wrote about my stepmother and me, "Narendra always respected all his step siblings. He also brought Laxmi Prasad, his stepbrother, to Kathmandu. He had equal love for his stepbrother and stepsisters. Narendra was also dedicated to his stepmother. When his stepmother used to come, he felt as if a sacred pilgrim had stepped into his house. Indeed, his feelings for his stepmother were high and I have witnessed that. Narendra was also intimate with his eldest stepsister Chandra Wati and youngest stepsister Gauri. Not only that, Narendra often remembers his younger stepsister Ram Kumari, who passed away about three and a half decades ago. He considered his stepsiblings as if they

were born from his own mother." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

Before migrating to the terai region, my mother handed over the remaining assets in the hilly region to my stepmother. In this context, Indira wrote about my mother's details as: "Divya Rupa had already gone through the partition of estate and was staying in a separate house across Chuwa. After the death of Narendra's father, I brought her to one of the houses in the courtyard of Jiju house. And then before migrating to Jhapa, I gave my remaining properties and all other household materials to Divya Rupa. She stayed in Hangpang for many years. Later she came to Kathmandu for a couple of years to stay with Kaale (Laxmi Prasad's pet name). On February 12, 2006, she passed away at the age of 83. Before she passed away, she came to visit me at *Nai Griha* (Nai home). She addressed me as 'my sister'. In every visit, she would bow down and touch my feet with her head as an act of reverence. She also wanted to see me before her last days. But my son Dirgha did not allow that to happen. He put a bar between our relationships. He did not allow me to meet Kaale's mother when she was taking her last breath. My wish to see Kaale's mother for the last time went unfulfilled. Aww, Kaale! May your mother's soul dwell in heaven." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

My Mother's Accident and My Birth

No matter how rich we were, our grandparents treated my mother like a servant. In that exploitation era, my grandparents burdened my mother with a lot of work. However, my mother took it differently; she accepted work as God's gift. Therefore, irrespective of my grandparents' order and out of her own wish, she worked hard. One of her main duties was to obtain and bring home red mud from *Chiple Dada* (a hill named Chiple). In the hilly region, red mud is primarily used for painting house floors and walls.

Because people extracted red mud by digging for many years, a cave-like chamber had formed in Chiple Dada. In February 1954, my mother along with my sister Nira went to Chiple Dada. Then my mother entered the chamber to extract mud. When Nira was about to enter inside the chamber, a mudslide occurred that buried my mother. My thirteen-year old sister turned towards *Baarbote* (name of a school) and shouted, "Help! Help! Help!" That time my eldest brother Bishnu and his friends were playing on the meadow of Baarbote Devi School. After hearing my sister's call, my eldest brother asked for help from people playing with him and went immediately to Chiple Dada. Slowly people started swarming in that place. When rescuers started digging slowly, they noticed a red ribbon like thread fastened with a plait on my mother's hair. Based on that

ribbon, rescuers slowly dug and with great difficulty got her out from that huge mud pile. At that moment, my mother had a seven-month old fetus in her womb.

My mother was brought home in a palanquin. Looking at her, it seemed as if she would not survive; however, where there is breath, there is hope. So my mother was kept under herbal medicinal treatment. The same day villagers went into a forest looking for *mauwa* (a medicinal tree). There was a belief that barks of a mauwa tree could even join a broken leg. Then the treatment of my mother started. There is a method of how to apply the bark of the tree. Essentially, the method was to grind the bark into small pieces and boil it for two hours in water. After cooling down, the remnants of that bark were stuck on to my mother's body that was then tied with clothes. After two to three hours, the barks dried, and water was applied to her body. For days and nights my sister Nira served and nursed my mother, who was in a state of semi-consciousness.

After my mother was buried in the mudslide, she was like a living corpse. By applying mauwa and feeding her on natural herbs, she was getting better and better with each passing day. Because she consumed different herbs, the fetus that was in her womb was also getting healthy nourishment. In due time, my mother went through a natural labor pain in half-consciousness and gave birth to a son. The son was named Narendra Raj Prasai by an astrologer.

Even after my birth, my mother was still battling with her consciousness. A few days before my birth, my uncle Roop Narayan and aunt Maheswara had a daughter named Manju. As the aunt had just given birth to a baby, she was producing breast milk. Because of that, I was fortunate enough to drink aunt Maheswara's milk. During that period, aunt Maheswara stayed

in our house. There were two houses in our courtyard. After uncle Roop Narayan brought a second wife, aunt Maheswara shifted to one of our houses. Because of that, Manju and I grew up together.

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My mother often told me, "I do not even have a picture of my second son Padma." She used to mention my brother Padma's face structure and character time and again. According to her, Padma's face, figure, and complexion matched with mine. I was familiar with an artist, Indra Khatri, who could sketch a person according to my description. To fulfill my mother's wish, I requested artist Indra to make a facial sketch of my second elder brother Padma. To make his job easy for him, I gave Indra my pictures when I was two, five, and seven years old.

Indra made a pencil sketch of my brother and handed it to me. Then I took Indra with me to show the picture to my mother. At that moment, my mother cried and said, "My second son." My mother asked me with tears in her eyes, "Why did not you show this picture to me for these many years." Hearing those words, I could not stop myself from crying. At that moment I could see a mixture of pride and brilliance in Indra's eyes arising from his art expertise. Indeed, my second elder brother's picture appeared miraculously.

I sent one copy of each of that picture to my eldest brother Bishnu and my sister Nira, both of whom were staying in Jhapa then. From them I received messages like this: "This is our second brother. From where did you find this picture?"

One day my mother told me, "Rich people establish prizes for their lost children. Because of my poor financial status, I could not do anything for my second son. He disappeared; his name just got erased. Now, I do not even remember his face." Those

words awakened me. That was when I requested Indra to sketch my second elder brother.

To fulfill my mother's wish, I established 'Nai BhaJaPa' prize that includes the partial name of my second elder brother Padma. The prize was established by combining the initial letters of my mother *Bha*giratha Prasai, my father *Ja*ya Prasad Prasai, and my brother *Pa*dma Raj Prasai. For the establishment of this prize, my son Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai also provided financial support. This prize is given to well-known Nepalese personalities who are dedicated to serving Nepalese literature. Given away biennially, this prize includes one hundred thousand Nepalese rupees. After establishing this prize, my mother shed tears of joy and said, "The one who did not take any ancestral property (see chapter 7) revived my second son. Now my second son will live till eternity. Dear son, you not only discovered a picture of my second son but also engraved names of my husband, my second son, and mine in the pages of history book forever."

The story about my second elder brother and me is also unique. Maybe because of that, my mother loved me more than any of my siblings. According to my mother, the story of we two brothers was like this: "I had to witness an untimely death of my second son. After he passed away, I cried for days and nights. One night, I saw a dream: My second son Padma was at the top of a precipice, sitting uncomfortably on a rock. 'Son, why are you sitting in such an uncomfortable place?' I asked. 'Mother where shall I go? I did not find a way,' he told me as he continued crying. 'Come on, I will carry you on my back,' I said and carried him on my back. Ten months after seeing that dream, I gave birth to my fifth son Narendra. According to that dream, my second son incarnated as my fifth son. For me, my son Narendra was born to wipe away my tears. That is why I love him two-fold.

Narendra's figure, complexion, habit, and character match with my second son." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

Since childhood, I was obedient to my mother. When she was with us, she meant the whole world to me. After she passed away, my thoughts usually centered on her. My wife Indira has written about my mother and me, "Narendra and my mother-in-law had miraculously intimate relationship; both loved each other so much. I have neither seen nor heard such love between a son and mother. It was unique to see such affection and love that Narendra had for his mother. That is why, I feel that Narendra's behavior towards his mother was both exemplary and remarkable."

"Only after bowing and touching his mother's feet with his head, Narendra started his day. He did not even drink a drop of water before bowing down at his mother's feet. Not only that, no matter how busy he was, he gave time to his mother. Eating lunch with his mother, sitting nearby her for some time in the afternoon, and chitchatting before going to bed in the evening were his chores. Narendra also monitored his mother's eating and drinking habits, clothes she wore, and beds she slept on."

My mother's nature was far-sighted and transparent. Mainly, she tried to be well informed about her children. That was why she talked clearly to everyone. She was always strong and was never nervous while talking to her children. She never shared things that caused pain in her heart with any of her children. However, in every situation, whether joy or agony, she shared her feelings with me with an open heart.

I treated my mother like a living Goddess. My mother was my Goddess and I was her obedient worshipper. She trusted me a lot and I never broke her trust. In this context, my wife has written, "My mother-in-law was always proud of Narendra. She

often said that if it were not for Narendra and me, her residence would have either been in an elderly house or on a sidewalk. Yes, all her children have made progress and all have their household, but Narendra meant the world to her." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

My Mother's Residence and Eviction

During our stay in the hilly region, my mother with all her capacity and strength made our land probably the most fertile in that region. Till she stayed in Hangpang, Jiju house was considered a place of inspiration.

After I migrated to Jhapa, my mother did not like to stay in the hilly region with my youngest brother. So, to buy land in Jhapa, my mother started selling her land and jewelry and started sending money to my eldest brother in Jhapa. After receiving the money, my eldest brother started searching for suitable land for us. Wherever he went, he took me to those places. In the end, after being satisfied, we bought the land of Masala Dhimal in Salbari, Sanischare (a town in Jhapa district), Jhapa. The land's tenant was our relative, Ram Chandra Kharel. In those days, a landlord had to pay a certain amount of money to a tenant to own the land as his own. Because of that, my eldest brother paid ten thousand rupees to make that land our sole property. The Kharels were intimate with us. However, my mother often said that they should not have asked that much money from my eldest brother to set the land free. At that time one could find one biga land for three thousand rupees. My eldest brother continued regretting till many years in his life that we could have used the money given to Ram Chandra Kharel to buy another 3-4 biga land. We should not have rushed to get rid of the tenant. Our impractical knowledge

and my mother's absence in Jhapa were the primary reasons why we had to face such a huge loss.

In 1970, my mother migrated to Salbari, Sanischare of Jhapa district from Hangpang, Taplejung. After coming to the terai region, we had a total of nine biga land. However, there was still a tenant, Dumber Bahadur Baniya, in half of our land. Dumber was obedient to my eldest brother and he considered my mother as his own mother. During the Jhapa Movement, Dumber was considered as an active farmer politician and was intensely active in that Movement. After police made it hard for him to survive peacefully, Dumber, with his family, fled to India. Thus, that land also became our sole property and our two lands became one single plot. After that, we started cultivating the whole land.

In Salbari's new house my mother stayed with my youngest brother and me. Also, we made a separate house near our house for a plowman and a cook. At that time, people in the village were new to us and we were new to them. In other words, those faces looked strange to us. We then realized how difficult it was to migrate and settle in a new place. We were staying in that place because we had invested everything there. Three of us were staying there by enduring multiple difficulties. Especially, we got frightened while going to sleep at night. A jungle surrounded our land, so we got scared right from the dusk. Every day during dusk, we expected our relatives to visit that alien place as support. Almost every month, my eldest brother and sister-in-law came to visit us from Sanischare bazaar to Salbari. On the other hand, my mother went to my eldest brother's place in Sanischare bazaar from Salbari almost every week with consumable edibles in a bullock cart. This practice continued till partition of estate was not done. Salbari did not anticipate the

physical presence of my eldest brother and sister-in-law. However, we did feel that if they had pure affection for us, they would have stayed with us in that alien place or made some arrangements, so that we would not get scared at nights. Later, my mother made that place attractive. Knowing that we were going to settle there permanently, other people started building houses in our neighboring lands.

Our upper plot that Dumber Bahadur Baniya left was attractive. Because of that, a *bichari* (a non-gazetted third-class official in court) named Punya Prasad Koirala was tempted to seize our land. As my mother was a single woman, Punya must have thought that we would run away from the situation and it would be easy for him to seize our land. So, one day, he was prepared for plowing our land with twenty oxen. We were amazed as our land was about to be plowed without our permission. Seeing that, my mother took a *kukri* from our home. Then showing that *kukri* to the bichari and his plowmen my mother said, "Now let me see who will plow my land!" Seeing that fierce face of my mother, the bichari and all his plowmen fled from the scene. After that, we did not encounter any such incident ever again. That incident made us popular as local people started recognizing us. They started praising my mother: "The lady from Hangpang is brave and fearless!"

Shiva Prasad Siwakoti, son of my mother's sister, also had his residence in Salbari. He helped us and took care of us during difficult situations. He was also a leader of the Jhapa Movement. It was because of Shiva that I also got engaged in the Jhapa Movement. At that time, I was studying in Sanischare High School in eighth grade. After police and administration started bothering us, Shiva fled to India and I was sent to Kathmandu.

Having come from the hilly region, my mother was worried if she could ever adapt to the terai region. Initially, Salbari seemed like an alien place for my mother and me. During that time, Shiva Prasad Siwakoti, Bali Raj Ingnaam, Hari Rana Magar, and Indira Rana Magar provided us sufficient love, respect, and support. Farming in that strange place was terrifying for us. Salbari was known for thieves, dacoits, and wild animals, which created terror in our hearts. Because of my mother's strength and enthusiasm, we could grow crops in that area. Also, because of her skillful household performance, we were slowly getting settled in Salbari.

My mother was an industrious lady and I hardly saw her sitting idle. During our stay in Hangpang, she worked to the utmost and in Salbari also her diligence could be seen in its soil. She was always devoted to her work. She used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and would work till the evening. Indeed, her hard work transformed her Salbari's home and land into a paradise, in which she dreamed of spending the rest of her life.

After my eldest brother Bishnu bought fruit plants from Sanischare bazaar, my elder brother Bharat and I would carry them to Salbari. It was our responsibility to sow those plants. My mother, Bharat, my youngest brother Ganga and my hard work made our home in Salbari a beautiful place. From Salbari's orchard, we started making a good income by selling coconut, betel nut, litchi, mango, jackfruit, banana, etc. Our orchard looked attractive and our home was in the middle of the orchard. In front of our home, there was a garden and beyond that, there was an irrigation canal. Our land in front and on either side of our home was like a single plot. In other words, if we see from our home's *verandah* (a roofed platform along the outside of a house), our entire land could be scanned through. One of the most special features of that place was that one could obtain three harvests of crops per year. However, we could do only two harvests because without my mother's presence anything

looked almost impossible and her body and age was not fit for three harvests.

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In the mid-1980s, my mother sent me a letter from Jhapa to Kathmandu, "Let's do partition of estate; I want to live separately. How much ever I get, I will take that and live freely. Give how much ever whoever wants and then give the remaining land to me. My body cannot endure now. It is difficult for me to please others and live happily." Respecting my mother's words, I went to Jhapa. With everyone's consent, I facilitated the partition of estate and divided properties for my eldest brother, sister, and my mother.

We had bought Salbari's property by selling our ancestral property in Hangpang. Also, my eldest brother Bishnu and elder brother Dirgha had separately added some money out of their own pockets to that property we bought. During 1968-69, with the eldest brother Bishnu's expense, Dirgha was sent to Kathmandu to study and obtain a Master of Arts degree. That was why, during the partition, according to my eldest brother's demand and in agreement with my mother, half of the entire land in Salbari together with a home and land in Sanischare bazaar was separated for Bishnu. From what remained in Salbari after separating for Bishnu, one biga land was given to sister Nira. The remaining land was separated for my mother with the consent that after her death the home and land in Salbari would be transferred to my youngest brother.

During the day of the partition, my eldest brother told me, "You separated me from the family and now I am alone. After the partition, I will have a hard time for a few years. My son Sagar's SLC exam is coming soon. I have no idea about how to send him for further studies after he completes his SLC." I replied promptly to my eldest brother, "Brother, I will take responsibility

for him, you do not have to worry about anything." Later Sagar passed SLC exam in first division. In accordance with the promise that I made to my eldest brother, Sagar came and stayed with me in Kathmandu. I, then, enrolled Sagar as a Health Assistant in Maharajgunj Medical Campus. My eldest brother wanted to see Sagar as a doctor. That was why, I, with extreme difficulty, enrolled Sagar in a campus that was renowned for producing good doctors. Sagar stayed with me just for two years. When he was staying with me, my financial status was poor. To put it in simple terms, I was almost a destitute person. But when it came to the question of helping him with his studies, I was self-satisfied. No matter how bad my financial situation was, I wanted to see him as a doctor. But, I could not see that happen. What happened was, when I went to *Baglung* (a district in Nepal), he had animosity towards my ex-wife and left my home. I do not know if my elder brother Dirgha and his wife Sano Baba made Sagar go against me or if he did not like my ex-wife and me, and, so, left my home. Those details I could never understand. But, Sagar hated me to such an extent that he did not even want our presence in his marriage ceremony. My mother was also residing at Nai Griha then. Because my mother was staying with us, he did not even want his grandmother's presence in his marriage. Then, after a long interval, Sagar stepped on our home.

In the context of the partition of estate, my elder brother Dirgha had his own home and land in Kathmandu, so he did not want to mix his property, neither did he want to take our ancestral property. My elder brother Bharat also had his own home in Birtamod. So, I told my elder brother Bharat, "You also have a land and a home. I think it will be wise if you also do not take ancestral property. I too will not take any. We have so little property, how much to divide, shame on us!" And he readily supported my opinion. In that era, a married daughter would not receive a share of the ancestral property. So, after knowing that

sister Nira would receive a piece of our land, my mother shed tears of joy. After sister Nira received ancestral property, eldest brother Bishnu and elder brother Bharat were also happy.

Our property, whatever it was, partition was done with my initiative. But, I did not take any ancestral property for myself: not an inch of land, not a gram of gold, not even a paisa (pice) of money. That is why my mother cried bitterly during the day of the partition. She told, "All your brothers have a house and all are staying in their own houses. But you do not have a house or land anywhere, neither do you have any solid source of income." At that time I also burst into tears and told her, "Your hand is on my head. My mother's blessing is enough for me. I am confident that with your blessing I can stand on my own feet. We have less land. I did not want to take ancestral property and snatch food from you people's mouths. I am satisfied with the way I am."

We did the partition of estate in my elder brother Bharat's home in Birtamod, Jhapa. The next day, I went to a government office to transfer the ownership of the land to my eldest brother, sister, and my mother. Our close relatives Krishna Raj Prasai and Nanda Kumar Prasai were witnesses of the partition.

During the partition, both of our close relatives Krishna Raj Prasai and Nanda Kumar Prasai told me in a loving tone, "You are great, brother! We have never seen a son who has not taken a share of his ancestral property." Then I replied, "I can live anyway. I have a blessing from my mother and that is all I need. If I have God's blessing, I will be able to do more for my mother, brothers, and sister."

After partition, my eldest brother constructed a house in Salbari. The distance between his house and my mother's house was about fifty meters. If we speak loudly in one house, we could hear that in the other. Almost every day, my mother would

visit her eldest son and daughter-in-law. Also, if her eldest daughter-in-law cooked something tasty, she would offer it to my mother. Those days my youngest brother and his wife were also treating my mother well.

Because my youngest brother was taking care of my mother, I supported him with money and other material things. Sometimes, even if something was beyond my capacity, I helped him by taking out loans from other people. But in later days, I realized that my help for my youngest brother was like feeding an elephant with a handful of grass. In other words, he was never satisfied with my help.

Before the partition, my youngest brother made my mother happy with his religious and moral conduct. He never ate fowl, hated alcohol, and did not even eat food that was touched by Kshatriyas. He never took out *janai* (a sacred thread worn by a male) from his body. That was why my mother trusted my youngest brother in every respect. However, after the partition, my youngest brother slowly started forgetting his moral duties, manners, and religious acts.

A few years after the partition, my youngest brother told my mother, "There are legal loopholes regarding the ownership of our land. We must ensure our ownership now, otherwise, our eldest brother will not let us use our land. After your death, he will transfer our land to his ownership." My mother was easily convinced by the words of her youngest son with whom she was staying then. Without informing my eldest brother, my youngest brother and his wife took my mother to the land revenue office in Chandragadi, Jhapa. My youngest brother and sister-in-law transferred all my mother's property to the ownership of my youngest sister-in-law. That time before providing thumbprints on the legal papers as an agreement of transfer of property, an

officer told my mother in front of my youngest brother and his wife, "Mother! You are giving all your property to your son and daughter-in-law; now what if they go against you and throw you out of your house?" Those words pierced my mother's heart and made her speechless.

After scraping every bit of land and property from my mother, my youngest brother and sister-in-law slowly started showing their true colors. In later days, my mother had become an impediment to my youngest brother and his wife. My mother did not want to complain or protest about this to her eldest son, who was staying near her house because she knew that her eldest son would mock at her with arrows of sarcasm. My mother felt as if a fire was burning in her gut and that was why she wanted to come to Kathmandu to stay with me. So, I arranged an air ticket for her to travel to Kathmandu. Whenever my mother traveled by air to and from Kathmandu and Jhapa, I arranged air tickets for her. Since I was there, none of her other children in Jhapa or Kathmandu took responsibility or cared for her. Wherever my mother stayed, according to my capacity, I arranged expenses for her. After their 'impediment' was removed, her children in Jhapa led carefree life in the absence of my mother.

Those who took ancestral property did not show any kind of care or concern about my mother. They did not care what my mother was eating or what she was wearing. For example, I was in *Biratnagar* (a city 89 km away from Birtamod, Jhapa) in 1996. I usually stayed in General Bhupal Man Singh Karki's home 'Bandhu Niwas' in Biratnagar. General Karki and his wife Bhuma Karki treated me like their own son and also respected my mother. Once, when I was in Bandhu Niwas, I talked to my mother on the phone. My mother cried and said, "Son, I wish to meet you." I replied, "Mother, come to Biratnagar with your youngest son." According to my advice, the next day my youngest

brother and my mother came to Biratnagar. Looking at her appearance, I almost cried. Her clothes were worn out, hands and feet were dirty and she was wearing dirty flip-flops, bands of which did not match with one another; i.e., one band in one flip-flop was blue and another band in another flip-flop was yellow. I could not stand that sight, so I immediately took my mother for shopping and changed her appearance right away.

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Once, my mother came to Nai Griha. At that time my, youngest brother and his wife kept all my mother's gold jewelry and her nice clothes with them. Seeing her devoid of jewelry, my heart became cold and I asked my mother about that. After a detailed description from my mother, I got shocked. My mother had a liking for jewelry. That was why, with so much difficulty, I had bought different jewelry for her from time to time. At that moment, we were unable to buy jewelry for her all at once. After consultation with Indira and my mother, I talked to my youngest brother on the phone and later wrote a letter, "Our mother's jewelry will be yours after her death; you can keep this letter as evidence. Please come with that jewelry, my brother!" According to his demand, I sent him a return air ticket, and then he brought that jewelry to Kathmandu.

After staying in Nai Griha for a few months, my mother wished to go back to Jhapa. For the sake of her happiness, we sent her to Jhapa. After staying in Jhapa for a few months, my youngest brother and his wife became alarmed thinking that my mother might stay with them forever. They then started showing their unkind behavior towards my mother. They considered my mother a huge burden. They were looking for an opportunity to drive her away from her home; they were just about to drag her out of the house by force.

I used to send money regularly for my mother's fruits and medicine expenses. Later I came to know from my mother that my youngest brother and his wife neither gave fruits nor medicines to her. Every now and then my youngest brother shouted at my mother, "Am I your only son? Is there any rule that only I have to take care of you? You can go wherever you want." Not only that, my youngest sister-in-law, Ram Kumari, also used to shout in front of my mother. One day, she screamed looking at my mother: "Hey people of this society, either chase me away from this house or chase this old lady away. I cannot live with this old lady." My mother wanted to spend the rest of her life in Salbari, the place where she poured her blood, sweat, and tears and made it like heaven. But the circumstances were against her. She never expected that a son from her own womb would be that cold and heartless. At that point, she had lost her appetite and even thirst; she was just experiencing a state of homelessness. During that period, Aruna Lama (a popular Nepalese singer) had gone to Salbari to visit my mother. Aruna became aware of everything about what was going on in an overnight stay. Later when we met, Aruna told me, "Your mother is in a difficult situation, brother!"

My mother stayed in Salbari for almost three decades. She protected her youngest son, daughter-in-law, and their children until she was eighty years old. Till that time period, my youngest brother and sister-in-law had confiscated all my mother's properties. After that, they stopped taking care of my mother, who became like a woman without an heir.

The son and daughter-in-law who were enjoying my mother's property and who were supposed to take care of my mother were showing inhumane behavior. I also came to know more about my mother's miserable condition and her fragile physical state from my eldest brother Bishnu, elder brother Bharat

and sister Nira. I could not digest my mother's helplessness. So, Indira and I talked about serving my mother and taking care of her. Then, I went to Jhapa and came back to Kathmandu with her. We, husband and wife, took good care of my mother. However, after a few years, my mother said, "I am missing my youngest son," and she wanted to go back to Jhapa, again!

My Mother's Helplessness

My sister Nira told me over the phone, "I think our mother's last stage has arrived. If you want to see her face before she dies, come soon to Jhapa." Our elder sister-in-law, Rupa (Bharat's wife), also talked to me over the phone and told me, "Your mother is in a critical condition; I do not see anyone taking care of her. She was saying, 'If my son Narendra comes, I will survive." Then I landed in Jhapa the very next day.

When I reached Jhapa, my mother looked frail. She was sleeping and spoke immediately after seeing me. She had spoken for the first time after a gap of a few days. She held my hand, cried loudly, and said, "Son! My son! Do not leave me ok! Take me with you wherever you go. Do not leave me alone in this hell, my son!" Those words, which came from my mother, broke my heart into pieces. Without reproaching or cursing any of my brothers, I brought my mother to Kathmandu.

My mother lived with us in Kathmandu since May 12, 1999 and we were dedicated to giving her all comfort as per our capacity. When I brought her from Jhapa, my mother was skin and bones. After her arrival in Kathmandu, Indira started sleeping next to her on the same bed. Regarding her treatment, one of our duties was to take her to doctors and the next important duty was to feed her well so that she could gain weight.

My mother's treatment was getting better. But during the early phase of her treatment, she was reluctant to eat. Slowly, Indira started feeding my mother with her own hands. Then my mother started gaining weight and soon we could see a glow on her face. My mother was happy with our service and within a few days, her facial appearance changed. At that time, we had not thought that we could treat my mother so easily in such a short period.

During that period, our son Kanchanjunga, daughters Niketika and Anukritika, and nephew Arjun were staying with us at Nai Griha. They were also dedicated to taking care of my mother. They took my mother for a walk every morning and evening in rotation. So, my mother walked in our neighborhood for about half an hour each day. Our son, daughters, and nephew not only served my mother but also made her realize that she was not alone in the battle of life, which made her heart stronger. It seemed as if Niketika and Anukritika were glued to my mother. Sometimes, they slept with her overnight. I have neither seen nor heard that her other grandchildren in Jhapa, whom she nursed and cared for, huddling together with her as Niketika and Anukritika did.

We were sincerely engaged in making my mother's life easy at Nai Griha. My mother had three beds in our home for sitting and sleeping purposes. For her to bask in the sun, we kept one bed on the roof floor. We kept another bed for her to rest and sleep on the second floor. That is our most well-ventilated room in the entire house and is also our main sitting room. On the first floor, we have beds for my mother and us to sleep at night. Seeing our devotion to my mother during such a weak financial condition, Ghattaraj Bhattarai (a Nepalese litterateur) appreciated us publicly while delivering speeches at literary conferences and regarded us as the epitome of caregivers.

My mother liked guests coming to our house. Whenever someone came to our house, she would sing a verse as a gesture of welcoming the guest. One of the guests, Bhadra Kumari Ghale (a Nepalese litterateur, politician, and former minister), was her favorite as she used to come about once every month. During each of her visits, she would bring things like shawls, towels, or sometimes socks as gifts for my mother. She would take off socks that my mother wore and replace it with new socks with her own hands. Respect of this magnitude from a former minister (Bhadra Ghale) of Nepal became heart-warming occasions for my mother. After my mother's death, each year during Bhadra Ghale's birthday, i.e., on March 2nd, I go to her house, take off her old socks, and put back on new socks with my own hands.

Those days Koili Devi (a Nepalese singer of my mother's age) was under the supervision of Nai. She used to come to Nai Griha frequently. My mother and Koili Devi had become intimate friends and they shared their feelings of agony as well as joy. Indira and I used to listen to the pain of Koili Devi about not having a child of her own. My mother also vented her agony that was caused by her children, who were indifferent to her. After listening to my mother and Koili Devi's chatter, Birendra Bahadur Shah (Nai's God Father, of my mother's age) expressed his feelings and his words are still buzzing in my ears: "Thank God I did not marry. I am miles away from that burden. I am living a blissful life."

In the last quarter of her life, my mother suffered from diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, ulcer, and Alzheimer's disease. According to the necessity, we took her to qualified specialists, but her primary physician was Prof. Dr. Mathura KC. Maybe because he was also a litterateur, Dr. KC did not want to take any fee for examining my mother and he regularly examined her free of cost for ten years. Also, Prof. Dr. Ram

Prasad Upreti, Prof. Dr. Siru Prasai, and Dr. Birendra Jhapali played important roles in reviving my mother from poor health conditions.

According to our capacity, we did our best for my mother to lead a healthy and happy life. But after her health started getting better, she told time and again, "I want to go to Jhapa!" We wished that my mother had stayed with us because we knew that she would suffer in Jhapa, but her wish was stronger than ours. Salbari was the place where she had poured her blood, sweat, and tears and the intense feeling that she had to go to Salbari was haunting her. Even though we were against it, we did not want to spoil her joy, and as per her wish, she went to Jhapa, again!

After staying in Jhapa for a few days, my mother fell badly on a restroom floor. Nobody took her to a doctor and she was just lying down on her bed. "Mother has become old, now the time has come for her to die, so what is the point of getting her a medical treatment?" That was the mentality of her youngest son. She seemed like a log of a tree lying on a bed. The extent of indifference was such that houseflies were buzzing all over her body and there was no one to fan flies away from her face. My sister Nira and elder sister-in-law Rupa told all this to us in detail. After hearing such painful news, I went to Jhapa immediately. No one, including my mother, had guessed that I would reach there unexpectedly. I went towards my mother. After seeing her situation, my eyes became wet. I touched her, then my mother started crying and I also started crying. The next day, without saying anything to anyone, I returned to Kathmandu with my mother. Then my wife and I started treating my mother in our home. This time she was feeling better with our simple treatment in the house.

Later, my mother gradually started losing her consciousness to the extent that she could barely recognize me. To endure such a situation, I had no alternative but to cry. After some days Indira said, "It seems that mother has some kind of problem related to the brain. I will talk to our niece Bijaya (Prof. Dr. Bijaya Panta, who is Dr. Basanta Panta's wife) soon."

According to the advice of Dr. Basanta Panta (a neurosurgeon), we took my mother to the Model Hospital in Kathmandu. Dr. Kapil Upadhya and Dr. Panta checked my mother's health. Both gave their decisive opinion that she needed surgical operation. About my mother's operation, my wife has written, "My mother-in-law's head operation was a big deal for us. For a woman who is almost ninety years old, we never thought that she would have to go through head surgery. "Doctor, does she have to go through an operation? Cannot she be treated using medicines? If she recovers using medicines, why let her go through all this pain?" I asked Dr. Panta over the phone. "We have to operate her as soon as possible. Today we will do further investigation and we will do an operation tomorrow; you go and admit her to the hospital today," replied Dr. Panta. "Doctor, will she not be in a danger during or after an operation; will she recover properly?" again I asked him with a tone of doubt. Dr. Panta replied, "You see, after an operation, she will recover by ninety-nine percent; she will become as good as before she fell in the restroom. But if we do not operate, you need not take her to your home; you can just wait here for her to die. I am in doubt if I will be able to operate her tomorrow or not. There is a blood clot in her brain and the clot is pressuring her brain. If nothing happens tonight, then I will operate her first thing in the morning. Let us see what God has to offer!" (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

After listening to Dr. Panta, I also felt that my mother should go through an operation. According to the doctor's advice, we admitted her to the Model Hospital on June 10, 2005. The next morning, Dr. Panta performed a successful operation to remove the blood clot. During the entire procedure, Dr. Kapil Upadhaya also played an important role.

To look after my mother in the hospital, my son Kanchanjunga, daughter Anukritika and nephew Arjun were ready and united, as always. My mother and Anukritika became even closer to each other. My mother felt somewhat relieved after she talked with Anukritika. At that time the Chief Secretary of the Government of Nepal, Lok Man Singh Karki, and his wife Sunita Karki came to the hospital and showed deep concern about the health of my mother. Prof. Dr. Ram Prasad Upreti (my maternal uncle's son) also came to see my mother. However, even in such a critical situation, those two sons in Salbari who were enjoying our ancestral property neither showed up nor inquired about my mother over the phone.

After sufficient improvement in her health or in other words after coming back to consciousness, my mother said unexpectedly, "When will I go to Jhapa again?" A few days later she started recollecting her past sufferings and agony that she had experienced in Jhapa. Then she started saying, "I will never go to Jhapa again. I do not want to burn in that hell. My youngest son and daughter-in-law are devils who have made me helpless time and again. Now the only thing that remains to be done by them is to carry me out of the house and throw into a river while I am still alive."

My Mother and Her Interrelationship with Indira

To my knowledge, my wife Indira fulfilled all of my mother's wishes. Indira always went ahead and took care of my mother's medicines, food, and clothes. Indira knew everything about my mother, from her choices of food to her clothes, which I did not know about. Not only that, whenever my mother was unwell, Indira would stay in my mother's room almost all the time. When the degree of illness increased, Indira would sleep in my mother's room. Indira was like a Goddess to my mother. My eldest brother Bishnu and his wife, as well as elder brother Bharat and his wife have highly appreciated Indira's service towards my mother. My mother used to say frequently, "Indira is not only my daughter-in-law; she is my mother too." In this context, sister Nira used to tell both of us (Nai), "If you were not here today, I do not know what would have happened to our mother. Most likely she would have been homeless. When I think about our mother's condition in Jhapa, I get lightheaded. She was carrying a fetus in her womb when she became a victim of mudslide. Now, it is obvious that the baby was born to take care of her."

My wife Indira served my mother with all her heart and I cannot elaborate on the details. Excessive compliment to a wife by her husband can be biased. So I stop her praise right here.

After my mother came to Nai Griha, the primary duty of Nai couple was to take care of her. This detail was clear to our relatives as well. In this context, Jaya Prasad Upreti (my maternal uncle's son) wrote, "Bhagiratha Prasai says, 'Indira, if you were not there for me, I would have died a long time ago. You are my mother!' How often do we get to hear a mother-in-law calling her daughter-in-law a 'mother'? Such a powerful statement has emotionally melted my heart." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2017 Second Edition: Indira Prasai).

My mother did not get many relatives to see her from my father's side and the frequency of their visits was also low. However, she often got visitors from the clan of her maternal home. One of the most common visitors, Prof. Dr. Ram Prasad Upreti (my maternal uncle's son) came to see my mother almost every week. In this context, Prof. Dr. Upreti has written, "My *saili didi* (father's sister) often says, 'Without Indira, my life would not have been like this. Indira is not only my daughter-in-law but my mother too.' Indeed, Indira's behavior towards her mother-in-law is outstanding, exemplary, and motivational. She is centered on her mother-in-law most of the time. In general, a daughter-in-law does not like her mother-in-law. But in our context, a daughter-in-law loves her mother-in-law, and this world's rarest occurrence is seen at Nai Griha." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

I do not know how much Indira has served her own mother. But I do know how much Indira had served my mother. When compared to Indira's service towards my mother, mine was almost nothing. She never served my mother for the sake of doing it; she meant what she was doing. Not only that, when my mother was staying with us at Nai Griha, Indira made sure that we (Nai) did

not go out of the Kathmandu Valley, so that we could be readily available in case of an emergency.

Indira kept my mother in her heart and feelings. She told other people and also wrote the same detail, "My mother-in-law is a great woman, who never showed her deep wounds to people of the society. She walked through her life by drinking her own tears. My association with my mother-in-law has proved to be important. Getting to know her and be with her so close has made my life worthwhile. The closer I get to her, the better personality I find in her. Indeed, after listening to her life's story, what she went through is not like an imaginary story but is more like a lively novel." (*My Mother-In-Law*, 2008: Indira Prasai).

Indira is mature in everything, not only in the management of the household but also when it comes to the management of people. I used to get surprised at her service towards my mother. In this entire world, I have neither seen nor heard a daughter-in-law taking care of her mother-in-law like Indira did for my mother. Her service towards my mother was not done out of formality, neither was that done to show other people. There was no condition, neither was there any selfishness in Indira's service towards my mother. Indira's love and service towards my mother were pure, spontaneous, and holy. That is why my mother was happy with Indira. Before her death, my mother blessed Indira every day and almost every moment. One of the most frequent visitors at Nai Griha was Mod Nath Prasit (a litterateur and former minister). Seeing Indira's love towards her mother-in-law, Prasit said, "I get amazed seeing Indira's service towards her mother-in-law. She is like a guru of service." In regard to serving my mother, my eldest brother and his wife have done a thorough evaluation.

Once my eldest brother and his wife came to Nai Griha to see my mother, and she told them, "Take me with you to Jhapa; I want to see Jhapa." Then my eldest brother and his wife politely said, "We cannot take care of you as much as Indira is doing here. It would be best if you do not go anywhere. You are living in a paradise. We are happy to see you here like this."

My mother was proud of Indira. She loved Indira's public speeches. If she came to know that Indira was going to give a speech, she would say, "Take me with you to that place." While Indira was delivering her speech, my mother would tell people beside her, "The one who is talking now is my daughter-in-law!" My mother often praised Indira and said, "My daughter-in-law has a huge personality; she is a mighty lady. She is evidence that women can achieve anything. Indira was born as a female, but if given an opportunity, she can work more than a man. She is also a respected lady. She has been an advisor to the Government of Nepal. The respect and honor that she has garnered belong to the whole Prasai family too." My mother uttered her views and remarks regarding Indira by citing proverbs and verses. I reckon the degree of loving devotion that Indira showed to my mother was equal to my mother's blessing that she showered on Indira.

If I have to name a person who knows, respects, and understands my mother the most in this world, I would choose Indira's name with pride. She understood everything about my mother from inside to outside. When my mother was alive, Indira wanted to fulfill all her wishes. It seemed as if Indira's world was my mother; Indira served my mother to that extent. She was around my mother most of the time. After my mother's death, Indira expressed her goodwill and respect to my mother. Indira presented my mother as the epitome of a Nepalese woman of

her era and considered my mother as a role model. That is why, my mother often told about my wife Indira, "A daughter-in-law like Indira cannot be found in this whole wide world. When everyone disregarded me, Indira saved and protected me. She is not only my daughter-in-law but my mother too."

My Mother and Kanchanjunga's Dedication to Her

We five sons addressed my mother as Aama whereas her daughters-in-law and grandchildren called her Mata. My son Dr. Kanchanjunga Prasai was obedient and devoted to my mother. Whenever he entered home, he would look for his Mata first. During school vacations, he would go to Jhapa to spend time with his Mata. My mother also wanted to give him all the happiness during his stay. If my mother said something, that would become law for him. In this context, my mother performed Kanchanjunga's *Bratabandha* (a religious ceremony in which a male is offered to wear a sacred thread) in my absence.

My mother earnestly loved Kanchanjunga, and to the same extent, Kanchanjunga also loved his Mata. She frequently told, "Among all of my grandchildren, I love Kanchanjunga the most. Reciprocally, Kanchanjunga also loves me the most among all of my grandchildren. Those grandchildren whom I nurtured and cared for in Jhapa do not even inquire about me."

Kanchanjunga always appreciated the service that Indira and I rendered to my mother. During his academic vacations, Kanchanjunga did not want to leave my mother. That is why my mother was more attached to Nai Griha. She stayed in Nai Griha for twelve years. We did not take any kind of ancestral property, yet we supported my mother physically, mentally, and financially.

We were financially weak during that period and our household situation was weak; however, no matter what we provided the best we could to our family. Neither did we complain to the heirs of the ancestral property, nor did we demand that they should do this or that. My wife and son never expected anything from anyone; neither did they show any kind of greed. My son praises me for not taking ancestral property. Regarding this, my mother-in-law, Durga Devi Nepal, also praises me. She sometimes questioned her sons, daughters-in-law, and daughters: "Without taking any ancestral property, what is the name of the person who is devoted to his mother and takes care of his mother?" Whatever answers came from whomever, my mother-in-law would reply with pride – "it is Narendra Raj Prasai!"

When my mother was in Kathmandu, Kanchanjunga would bring gifts like a shawl, shoes, etc., for her from abroad during his academic vacations. He never came empty-handed. Every evening he would apply oil on his Mata's feet and massaged to make them strong and supple. He also arranged his Mata's bed for her to sleep. That is why his Mata always looked for and inquired about him. Towards the end of her life too, his Mata kept on looking for Kanchanjunga. When visitors came to our home, she, in her half-consciousness inquired, "Did Kanchanjunga come?" One day Sandesh (youngest son of my eldest brother) came from Norway. He came with a gift to see my mother at Nai Griha and she asked in almost an unconscious state, "Are you Kanchanjunga?" He said, "No," and identified himself as Sandesh. Even though he was not Kanchanjunga, my mother was still happy knowing Sandesh came to visit her because she loved Sandesh more among other grandchildren.

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My mother used to worry about me. She often used to tell me that her end was approaching. In this matter, my mother and

I used to have discussions and arguments. At that time, Indira would listen to our conversations and transcribed it in her book:

"After my death, you will need money for my funeral rites. How will you manage, my son? That time you all brothers work in harmony, ok?" My mother-in-law often told Narendra.

"Mother, you just stay quiet; why are you talking about death?" Narendra answered his mother in an angry tone, as he could not imagine his mother's death.

"No son, do not be angry. All humans have to die one day," his mother told him politely.

"See mother, no one knows about life and death. If I die before you, then the circumstances will be different. But if you die before me, then, I will somehow manage the expenses. I will not ask my brothers." Narendra often vowed in front of his mother.

"You and Bharat did not claim or ask for the ancestral property. You were alone when you left us and did not show any kind of greed. How can you do my funeral rites alone, you say, my son?" My mother-in-law asked him again in an anxious tone.

"Mother! Do not worry! In these many years, I did not ask anyone's help for your treatment. I did not show my agony to anyone. It is not necessary that only those children who take ancestral property have to take care of their mother. Mother, this also relates to one's faith and devotion. You are my Goddess. We do not keep accounts for the service that we offer to Gods," Narendra assured his mother. After listening to him, my mother-in-law's face glowed with joy.

"It was Narendra's duty to assure his mother. However, for a person without a solid income source, it was not an ordinary

or a simple matter to arrange money, in a large sum, all at once. That is why, sometimes, Narendra got anxious about a potential accident or sudden demise of his mother and the inevitable financial predicament that might follow."

"It is okay, let us see, my mother's blessing is with me. Let us see what is God's plan." There was no option for Narendra than to let go of that kind of anxiety. But God was looking after us because during that period Kanchanjunga got a scholarship for a doctorate from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Shreveport, USA." (*Bhagiratha Prasai's Liberation*, 2012: Indira Prasai).

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While Kanchanjunga was studying in the United States, he used to talk to his Mata almost every day through Skype. Later when his Mata was in half-consciousness, he would see her via Skype. In the end, when his Mata left her physical body, he saw her last appearance through Skype. After my mother passed away, Kanchanjunga maintained necessary cleanliness for thirteen days according to the advice from my wife and me.

Kanchanjunga knew that I did not have enough money to perform my mother's funeral rites. "Father, please do not worry about Mata's *karma kanda* (prescribed rites and rituals after death), I will take care of all the expenses," said grief-stricken Kanchanjunga while talking to me over Skype. "I will also take care of expenses for *purana* (Sanskrit compendia of myth and ritual lore) done in Mata's name," assured mourning Kanchanjunga.

Kanchanjunga had reached America six months before the death of his Mata. At that time, he was crawling as a new

Ph.D. student and saved some money out of the stipend that he received from the university. Despite that, he showed his devotion and said, "I am also my Mata's grandson. That is why I also have the responsibility and duty towards her. So, I will bear all funeral expenses including karma kanda and purana. You need not take money from any of your brothers." Our son's thought seemed reasonable to Indira and me, so I passed the same message to my brothers. They were delighted to hear the message. Accordingly, Kanchanjunga sent money for all the rituals related to his Mata's death.

Kanchanjunga was not only attached to his Mata when she was alive. After her death too, he has been constantly showing his devotion towards her. He remembers her every day, bows his head in front of her pictures, gets her blessing, and then only starts his day.

My Mother's Last Breath

Throughout her life, my mother went through physical, mental, and social struggles. Towards the end of her life, she said, "You can completely know a person only at the end of your life." After becoming old, she was compelled to leave the heavenly abode that she created from scratch. She had a deep pain in her heart because of those people who forced her to leave. After noticing her tears for days and nights, I asked myself, "Why, for what reasons, humans reproduce offspring?" My brothers always behaved as if I was the only son who was supposed to take care of my mother. Nobody had to spend a single penny in my mother's name. Yet, it would have been nice if her children had showed some kind of interest in her. Her children for whom she sacrificed her entire life were least concerned about her. How much would that have pierced her heart? How much would that invisible wound have burnt from inside? How much pain would she have endured because of her indifferent children? All these questions burnt and pained my heart. If anyone were in my shoes, that person would feel similar pain.

I never felt bad that I had to take care of my mother; I was just annoyed about the indifferent mentality of her biological children towards her. My mother singlehandedly managed to run the entire family since she was forty-four years old. Sometimes she cried, sometimes she slept with an empty stomach, and sometimes she became restless, but for the sake of her children,

she never became a victim of despair. Her motto was, "My children should lead a good life." She endured numerous pains and sacrificed her whole life for the sake of her children. How much pain would she have experienced when, even on her deathbed, her children disregarded her? During those days my mother said, "They took everything from me. Now I am like a dry river. That is why everyone is disregarding me. If you were not there for me, they would have thrown me on a roadside eons ago."

As time passed, my mother gradually became weak and later on, she became bedridden. During the winter season, my mother loved to bask in the sun and stay on the roof floor. But on December 9, 2011, my mother could not walk after basking and go down to her room. That day, her brother's son, Prof. Dr. Ram Prasad Upreti, carried her on his back to her room. From that day onward, my mother lay on her bed and she never saw the sky again.

My mother's physical condition was getting worse. For one and a half months, my mother could not move from her bed. I frequently informed my siblings in Jhapa about my mother's condition. But they did not care and I felt as if they were taking my words from one ear and throwing them out from the other. They did not even call once during her critical condition. Instead, I used to call them from Kathmandu. I knew that showing my pain to people in Jhapa was like pouring water in dry sand.

My mother had started getting bedsores, on which Indira applied dressings every day. I could not see that condition, so I used to come out of the room and cry. Looking at that dreadful state of my mother, one day I prayed to God, "Dear God, please take my mother with you, I cannot see her in this pain!" The next day, on January 27, 2012, I talked to

Kanchanjunga over Skype and told him, "Son, it has been extremely difficult for me to see my mother in that condition, so I have asked God to take her." Moments before I finished that conversation, Kanchanjunga started crying in the US and my wife started crying here. That day, I also cried a lot.

On the day of *Saraswati Puja* (a day dedicated to worship Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and arts) in 2012, early in the morning, as usual, I bowed and touched my mother's feet with my head to receive her blessing. She was sleeping on her bed. She was restless, so we knew that she was having difficulty. Indira started rubbing her chest slowly. My mother was sleeping on one side of her body. I put my hands below and above her cheeks. At that time, I kissed her on her cheek for the last time. I, then, cried and told Indira: "Mother has passed away, Indira!" At the age of ninety-three, my mother finally mingled with the universe.

I lost my mother. In that pain, I became restless and cried. For some time we both cried. But we had to go about duty according to our culture and tradition. So, we needed to be calm. According to Hindu religion, we cannot keep a corpse inside a room. So, we stood up, Indira went to our verandah and placed a mat for my mother. Then I carried my mother's body and kept her on the mat.

I believe my mother was an image of Goddess Saraswati. That is why in spite of so much pain she found herself in, she waited till Saraswati Puja to breathe her last breath. And when that time arrived, she passed away so easily. The day was January 28, 2012 Saraswati Puja at 8 AM. Another reason why I call her an image of Goddess Saraswati is that even though she was illiterate or deprived of formal education, she was actively engaged in promoting education among young children in her village.

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Because of heavy fog, for some days, the airport in Jhapa was not operational. But on January 28, the sun shone and the weather became fair, so normal service of the airport resumed. My eldest brother, along with my youngest brother and sister Nira, reached Kathmandu by air before the evening. We started my mother's last journey from Nai Griha after knowing that their flight took off from Jhapa to Kathmandu.

At that time, Madan Das Shrestha (my friend), Jaya Prasai (my relative), and Laxmi Prasad Prasai (my stepbrother) helped in arranging my mother's last journey. We took my mother's body to *Aryaghat* (a raised platform beside a river where a funeral rite is performed). We saw at Aryaghat, the funeral pyre for my mother had been arranged on the north side (i.e., number one funeral pyre) by Pasupati Development Fund's officials Narottam Vaidya and Shila Panta.

After placing my mother's body on the funeral pyre, my eldest brother Bishnu offered funeral fire to my mother. My material relationship with my mother thus ended at Aryaghat. The fire that was burning my mother's body was burning my heart too. However, the fire could not dry my tears. The more the fire blazed, the more tears dropped from my eyes.

Narottam Vaidya and Shila Panta did not charge any money related to the funeral service. Indira went a couple of times to pay for the charge but the accountants of Pasupati Development Fund refused to take. Vaidya and Panta told us not to talk further about that matter. That is why we did not have to pay for my mother's cremation ritual.

After the cremation, we returned to Nai Griha at about 8 PM. When we arrived, AIGP (Assistant Inspector General

of Police) Bhishma Prasai had already arranged a tent in the courtyard of Nai Griha. He also arranged about two-dozen blankets for sitting and sleeping purposes.

My eldest brother Bishnu, elder brother Bharat, youngest brother Ganga and I performed *kriya* (the funeral rites observed during the first thirteen days of someone's death) at Nai Griha. At that time, sister Nira, sister-in-law Rupa and my wife Indira also performed *kriya* with us.

I do not know what relationship my mother had with Sumi Chaudhari (our maid) in her past life; she continuously served my mother for the last six years of her life. In the end also, after my mother passed away, Sumi stayed pure, observed mourning procedures, and performed all rituals that she could.

During those thirteen days of *kriya*, people who helped us right from their hearts were Bishnu Prasad Prasai (a cousin), Toya Nath Odari (a son-in-law), Laxmi Apsara Pandey (a neighbor), and Madhav Nepal (a relative). During that time, Kirti Nidhi Bista (a politician) frequently came to Nai Griha in the mornings.

While performing my mother's *kriya*, there was an issue whether to listen the preaching of *garuda purana* (a Sanskrit compendium of mythos and ritual lore) or not. I, personally, did not believe in *garuda purana*, but sister Nira and sister-in-law Rupa insisted on listening to *garuda purana*. To talk over and decide this matter, I requested Dr. Devi Prasad Khanal (a Hindu priest) to come to Nai Griha. After Dr. Khanal arrived, we asked him questions, "Do we need to hear *garuda purana*? Will my mother's soul not get liberated if we do not do this? If we need to hear it, I do not have any objection." Then the priest noted my mother's date and time of death, made a horoscope out of it, and said, "For your mother, the preaching of

garuda purana or any type of sacred pilgrimage is not necessary. For her, none of these are essential. She has received a holy death and not everyone can get as holy death as she has. During *Satya Yug* (the best or golden age of creation), saints would go into jungles, meditate for years and pray for such kind of death. Even then, not all of them could get death like this. We have to listen to *garuda purana* in cases like suicides, motor accidents, people who die in evil moments, or people who die in wrong places. *Garuda purana*, in such cases, redeems the spirit from the dead. Many people do not understand this and listen to *garuda purana*. I am not saying you cannot listen to it; it is up to you, not for your mother, but for your own satisfaction." (*Bhagiratha Prasai's Liberation*, 2012: Indira Prasai). We could not go against Dr. Khanal's opinion; we all accepted his logical argument and did not listen to *garuda purana*.

We performed my mother's rites for thirteen days the best we could. On the thirteenth day, instead of donating materials like beds, beddings, cupboards, and other commodities, we donated cash to a Brahmin according to his wish. Also, we gave clothes to the Brahmin and clothes and jewelry to his wife according to our capacity. We went on performing rites that we were supposed to do as per our culture. After one year of regular rites, we performed my mother's *barakhi* (funeral ceremony performed one year after the death of the person mourned). Apart from yearly *shraddha* (ceremony performed periodically in honor of a family ancestor), we did not have to perform any more rituals.

Till thirteen days after the death of my mother, my youngest brother Ganga cooked meals, washed dishes, and did other necessary functions for all of us. We were amazed by his 'exceptional' service. Seeing that, my eldest brother Bishnu told my elder brother Bharat and me: "Our youngest brother must be looking for some kind of opportunity, that is why, he is serving us

so excessively." Later, I found the reason why our youngest brother was serving us like that. At the end of the thirteenth auspicious day of the funeral ceremony, Ganga took me to the roof floor of Nai Griha. He, then, took out a photocopy of a letter that I sent to him about 10 years ago and said, "I thought maybe you forgot what you said." Looking at his mentality, I collapsed within. Then I told him, "In the name of our mother, did I put any burden on my brothers? Did not your stomach become full after eating all our mother's property? Would our mother's jewelry go to her daughters, nieces, and others who incessantly served her or would you get them? You deceived our mother and took everything away including her jewelry. Writing to you the letter and assuring you that you would get the jewelry after our mother's death was the only way to get the jewelry back from you." Then, after my mother's *barakhi*, I distributed all my mother's jewelry to her caregivers as mentioned above; I did not keep even a bit for myself.

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My mother's physical body mingled with the universe but my devotion to my mother is eternal. Every moment my mother smiles in my heart, she cries and she whispers. My mother was like the sky who always sacrificed herself for her children. That great mother's name is Bhagiratha Prasai and I am proud that I am one of her children. Because of my mother's strong leadership, I am standing firm and strong on this earth today. During my adolescence, I read this somewhere, "If I read the best book in this world, then that is my mother." True, I have not read any better books than my mother. In fact, after reading that book, I have been able to stand on this earth.

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My Mother Bhagiratha Prasai is not a true story only about my mother. It is a representative true story of the majority of Nepalese mothers. I have seen, heard, and read stories of many mothers that are similar and/or even worse than my mother's. Most sons, in different ways, torment and hurt their mothers. But the mothers, in general, hide the agony in their hearts. Those mothers are great who always endure the pain inflicted by scars that stay permanently in their wombs. The inner agony and pain of those mothers do not generally come into the limelight like my mother's. In this story, my mother has acted as a real-life heroine who performed the leading role epitomizing most mothers of Nepal.

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What I understood from my life is that: "Nature's eternal truth is that a mother is someone whom we forget in happiness but remember in sadness."